

Libya reports progress in Lockerbie negotiations

TUNIS (R) — Libya said on Wednesday that talks with South African and Saudi envoys had allowed progress to be made towards resolving the Lockerbie affair and that consultations were continuing to overcome remaining obstacles.

The official Libyan news agency JANA, monitored in Tunis, said that Jakes Gerwel and Prince Bandar Ben Sultan who met Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi on Tuesday in Libya had held "important and expanded talks on the so-called Lockerbie issue."

"Important practical steps had been reached during these talks towards a solu-

tion to the issue and it had been confirmed that all parties had good intentions toward each other in order to find a solution through cooperation between these parties," the agency quoted a Libyan Foreign Affairs Ministry as saying.

"Consultations and efforts are still continuing in order to overcome remaining obstacles," it added. It did not elaborate. Gerwel, Mandela's chief of staff, and Prince Bandar, the Saudi envoy to Washington, had flown together to Tripoli.

JANA said the two envoys had handed Qadhafi letters from South African President Nelson Mandela

and Saudi King Fahd respectively in an attempt to persuade him to extradite two Libyan suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. A total of 270 people died in the disaster.

Libya last year agreed the pair should go on trial in a neutral country but demanded additional guarantees before handing them over.

The South African and Saudi envoys were on a "clarification" mission to facilitate a trial in the Netherlands by a Scottish court and under Scottish law as the United States and Britain have demand-

France proposes end to Iraq oil embargo

(Continued from page 1)

Regarding the control of Iraqi oil revenues, the French proposals do not provide for the continuation of an escrow account which under an oil-for-food scheme enables the United Nations to control Iraqi funds.

But Iraq and oil purchasers would be required to notify the United Nations of contracts.

Arms imports would continue to be scrutinised, and the import of equipment that could be used to reconstitute weapons of mass destruction systems would remain banned.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday that the French ideas contained "positive" elements, but the United States insists on disarmament before lifting the Iraqi embargo.

British Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock also raised the issue of turning the page on Iraqi disarmament, to concentrate on long-term monitoring, during the closed-door council discussions.

Greenstock said that the council needed to relate the French proposals "to the corpus of resolutions which we already have," diplomats said.

Meanwhile, Iraq, in an apparent policy shift, said it would prefer a balanced dialogue to break the impasse in its military confrontation with the United States and Britain.

"Iraq sees a need for a balanced dialogue based on

good intentions under the umbrella of the Arab Nation... to find practical solutions to the situations," a spokesman said after President Saddam Hussein met top aides late on Tuesday.

At the same time, two groups of Arab states said they would hold further talks in the next few days on relations with Baghdad, ahead of an Arab League foreign ministers meeting on Iraq on Jan. 24.

Some Arab states have been alarmed by Iraq's verbal attacks on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and by the call from Iraqi parliamentarians for Baghdad to scrap recognition of U.N. resolutions adopted after the 1991 Gulf War, including one recognising Kuwait.

Official Iraqi newspapers on Wednesday quoted the spokesman as saying after Tuesday's high-level meeting that "if solutions are desired in a serious manner that serve the Arab Nation's interest, they should be based on pan-Arab security."

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz were among those present at the meeting with Saddam.

The statement appeared to tone down Iraq's rhetoric against some Arab states, but the spokesman still called for Arabs to condemn supporters of last month's U.S. and British attacks on Iraq.

He said the right solution to the crisis should "consider any aggression from a foreign faction upon any Arab country as an aggression on the Arab Nation as a whole."

Iran denies ties with Russian institutes

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran on Wednesday denied U.S. charges that it worked with three Russian research institutes to develop nuclear and missile technology.

"These accusations are not new and Iranian and Russian authorities have already denied them," the Iranian embassy in Moscow said in a statement, quoted by the official Iranian news agency IRNA.

The United States announced Tuesday it would slap sanctions on three Russian research institutes for providing missile and nuclear assistance to Iran.

The Moscow Aviation Institute, Medvedev University and the Scientific Research and Design Institute of Power Technology will suffer "economic penalties," said U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger.

"Iran has no knowledge of the two institutes mentioned and it has just a few students studying law, languages and humanities subjects at the Moscow university," the embassy said.

"Iran has had no other relations or cooperation with the Moscow university," it said. Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov slammed the U.S. move on Wednesday as "counterproductive for Russian-American relations."



A Palestinian child wearing handcuffs carries a picture of his incarcerated father Wednesday during a demonstration in Gaza City to demand the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Some 300 children demanded that Israel adhere to its commitments under the Wye River peace accords signed with the Palestinians last month. (AFP photo)

Palestinian villagers stop settler bulldozers

QALQILYA (AFP) — Dozens of Palestinians from two villages in the north of the West Bank blocked Israeli settlers Wednesday from seizing land to expand nearby Jewish enclaves.

Villagers from Kafr Salaf and Azzun intervened to stop bulldozers guarded by armed settlers from levelling land and uprooting trees in an operation to appropriate several hundred hectares of land near the villages, witnesses said.

The settlers were from the communities of Ginnot Shomron, Enmanuel and Kiryat Shomron, the witnesses said.

They said an officer from the Israeli military liaison arrived on the scene and told the settlers that there was no official permission to confiscate the land, which falls in Area C of the West Bank where Israel has full control over civilian and military matters.

Three months ago the Israeli authorities ruled that the area in question was common land not owned by any one individual, but local Palestinians were given time to appeal the decision.

The Palestinians objected to the ruling and produced ownership documents but the

Israeli court has yet to announce a verdict on the claim.

At the end of 1998, Israeli settlers remained in control of six sites appropriated outside existing settlements in the West Bank, according to the Bethlehem-based Applied Research Institute.

Settlers grabbed more than a dozen plots of land after Israel's Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon urged them "to grab as many hills as possible" in the wake of the U.S.-brokered Wye River land-for-peace agreement signed in October.

PNA legislature gives Arafat two weeks on detainees cases

RAMALLAH (AP) — Palestinian lawmakers, furious that some 450 people are being held without trial for political opposition, gave Yasser Arafat's government two weeks Wednesday to either press charges or release the detainees.

In a stormy four-hour session at the Palestinian Legislative Council, lawmakers also demanded an end to political arrests and said all such prisoners should be released immediately.

Since the Palestinian National Authority was established in 1994, its security forces have arrested thousands of Palestinians accused of political or militant activity but only 11 have been charged and successfully prosecuted, according to legislator Hassan Khreishe.

Some lawmakers Wednesday suggested a no-confidence motion against Justice Minister Freih Abu Medein but later backed down after assurances that Arafat would release some prisoners next week as a goodwill gesture at the end of the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan.

The 88-member legislative council enacts laws for the young Palestinian autonomy but more often is at loggerheads with Arafat and his cabinet for not implementing their legislation or upholding existing law.

Outside the Palestinian legislature, scores of veiled Arab women chanting "Justice Minister, where is the justice?"

"We want an end to the

issue of political detention," said 39-year-old Muryassar Jaber whose husband Youssef was rounded up by Palestinian security agents after Islamists carried out a September suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

"This is the third holiday we will spend without him," Jaber said. "The only thing they did was believe in a political line that is different from the Authority." The issue of prisoners is one of the most emotionally charged in Palestinian society. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been jailed by Israel during nearly 30 years of military occupation, touching just about every Palestinian family.

Palestinians hoped that such arrests would end when their lives fell under Palestinian rule. But Arafat has also carried out large-scale arrests of suspected Islamists, including Hamas members often in response to attacks on Israelis.

The United States and Israel have pressured Arafat to continuously crack down on militants, something Arafat agreed to do in Mideast peace accords.

Khreishe said the legislature as well as the government is to be blamed for the continued arrests.

"For three years we have pursued this issue and we have failed to win their release just as the Palestinian negotiators have failed to win the release of prisoners in Israeli jails," Khreishe said.

'Election last chance for peace'

WASHINGTON (R) — Three women from Jerusalem — one Muslim, one Jewish and one Christian — on Tuesday warned that May 17 national elections in Israel could represent the region's last chance for peace.

Michal Shohat, a member of Israel's left-wing opposition Meretz Party and a candidate for the Knesset, said the outcome of the May elections would be critical in deciding the fate of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

"This election is going to be our last chance as Israeli citizens for peace," Shohat told U.S. peace activists in Washington on Tuesday.

The three women were travelling across the United States on a tour organised by Part-

ners for Peace, a U.S.-based peace group, and other organisations, with talks scheduled at churches, synagogues and universities from New York to Los Angeles.

Nahla Asali, a Muslim Palestinian who teaches at Bir Zeit University, said she feared the region would "sink into an inferno of suffering" if hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party, was reelected, and urged Israeli citizens to "choose peace, not bullets."

Fatin Muhawi, a Christian Palestinian, said a majority of Israelis and Palestinians supported peace and wanted decades of violence between the two sides to end.

JORDAN TELEVISION PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes

15:10 Cartoon — Superman
15:30 Science fiction — Space Precinct

16:30 (Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)
17:00 Drama — Sparks

18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal

19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News Headlines

19:35 Comedy — Family Matters
20:00 A Journey Across the Land of Islam

20:30 Drama — Dr. Quinn the Medicine Woman

21:10 Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00 News in English

22:30 Feature film — "Til There Was You"

23:59 Comedy — Dudley

00:30 End of T.X.

Friday Programmes

15:10 Animated Classics

15:30 Treasure Hunt

16:30 (Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)

17:00 The Simpsons

18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz

19:00 Le Journal

19:15 Words of Wisdom

19:30 News Headlines

19:35 Comedy — The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

20:00 Islamic Heritage and Art

20:30 Drama — "Babylon - 5"

21:15 Doc. — Full Circle

22:00 News in English

22:30 Drama — The X-Files

23:10 Feature film — "The Ernest Green Story"

23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:56 Fajr

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

05:11 (Sunrise) Doha

11:45 Dhufur

14:33 Asr

16:56 Maghreb

18:18 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church

Sweifish Tel. 5920740

Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4634590

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771757

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Moderate weather conditions will prevail during the day becoming cool at night. Clouds will appear at different altitudes and winds southeasterly to southwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and sea calm.

Amman 05/17

Aqaba 09/24

Deserts 03/18

Jordan Valley 07/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 17, Aqaba 22

Humidity readings: Amman

37 per cent, Aqaba 31 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 04/13

Jerash 06/18

Um Qays 06/16

Madaba 05/16

Petra 05/16

Dead Sea 11/24

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Youssef Rashid 4875792

Dr. Jun'a Abu Dhiab 4758348

Dr. Ahmad Mann'a 5359413

Dr. Walid Al Masri 5675455

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004

Rukm Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Issam Al Salih 021246858

Fou'ad Pharmacy 021275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Halaseh 09982799

Palestine Pharmacy 09983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 109

Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 4775121

Highway Police 5343402

Traffic office 4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5605800

Price Complaints 5661776

Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467

Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television 4773111

Radio Jordan 4774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic Abdi 56661317

Hussein Medical Centre 5858656

Luzaila 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 46442816

Akileh Maternity 46424112

Jabal Amman Maternity 4632362

Maltas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607540

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Musharraf Hospital 56672779

Al-Ahli, Abdali 56641646

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 47771013

Al-Bashir 477511126

Army Marka 489161175

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Amal Hospital 5607155

Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09983322

Zarqa National Hospital 09900560

Ibn Sina Hospital 09986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital 099990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital 021275555

Roman Catholic Hospital 021272725

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital 0217101372, 0217103101

Rosary Sisters Hospital 0217102831, 0217102011

Speciality Hospital 0217103100

AQABA:

Princess

American Muslim women challenge 'outdated' ideas, educate Americans against stereotypes

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A Muslim scholar said Wednesday that women in the world still suffer from thinking predominant during jahilia (pre-Islamic era), when men believed women were their property, stressing that the problem lies with families' failure to teach their children proper morals.

"The concept of women being the owners and guardians of their own morality is still rejected in the U.S. and worldwide," said Sharifa Khatib, founder and vice-president of the North American Council for Muslim Women.

"If women are taught the right values and true faith by their families they will behave morally anywhere in the world, without anyone having to worry about their morals," Khatib, who lectured on "Violence Against Women in the American Community and the Role of the Arab American Muslims in Combating it" at the Sisterhood Is Global Institute headquarters in Jabal Weibdeh.

Established in 1992 by 150 multi-ethnic women as an independent, continent-wide organisation, the

council concentrates on changing the stereotypical image of women and establishing a dialogue between all sectors of Muslim women while combating domestic violence in the U.S.

Although membership jumped to 450, Khatib said the creation of the council faced strong resistance from the community and Islamists.

"Many men and Islamists thought we had no business being an independent women's organisation, and it was very difficult for us to be accepted, especially by Islamists who thought that a man should be our president," she said.

"But we broke the stereotype and insisted on independence by emphasising the fact that we are Muslim women and we are proud to be so, but we want to be independent," she stated.

"In the end they got used to us and accepted us," she added.

One issue the council decided to drop before starting to accept membership, was the issue of hijab (woman's headscarf).

"We realised that talking about women's liberation would at first be confronted by the issue of hijab, and we decided that a piece of

cloth should not stop us, so we decided to put it aside," Khatib, who is a well-known speaker on gender equity and women's rights, said.

Another sensitive point the council had to deal with was teaching women that they are not the properties of their male guardians and that "they are never obliged by Islam to serve men."

"We help women to be empowered by their thinking and help them gain self-confidence and explain to them that they are independent human beings and their direct relationship should be with God. He is the only one who 'owns' their future," she said.

The council is also helping women in the U.S. tie the knot in accordance with Islam, by guiding them to demand equality and shared responsibilities with their husbands in their marriage contracts.

"At the same time we emphasise the idea that we want to preserve the family, not destroy it," she emphasised.

She pointed to a 1993 survey conducted by the council on violence against women in the U.S., the outcome of which showed that "ten per cent of all women surveyed had been subject

to incidents of violence, ranging from verbal, psychological, physical, sexual violence incidents and few cases of honour crimes."

"Our organisation has been deliberately and quietly working in the community on domestic issues, including violence against women and children," she told the gathering.

Khatib talked about the organisation's long-term plans to eliminate the stereotyping of Muslim women in the U.S. community.

Many Americans think that Muslim women do not have an independent mind, cannot think for themselves and are ignorant, she said.

"We try to change this image by participating in all public meetings and by building strong relationships with the press," she said.

Khatib, who is the guest of the United States Information Service at the American Embassy in Amman, said her future plans include conducting a second survey on domestic violence in the U.S.

She concluded by saying she also plans to run for the U.S. Senate "where I plan to protect women's rights."

House committee recommends lifting Abbadi's immunity

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — The Lower House Legal Committee has recommended that Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi's immunity be lifted so that he can be questioned by the criminal prosecutor in connection with an alleged case of sexual assault, the committee's chairman said Wednesday.

But Deputy Ghaleb Zu'bi stressed that should the House accept the committee's recommendations, the lifting of immunity would only be partial.

He explained that, therefore, it cannot be used for the purpose of detention.

Committee members were reported to have been split on whether to lift Abbadi's immunity only partially to allow questioning, but not an indictment, to lift it completely, or to delay discussion of the matter till after Eid Al Fitr holidays.

But according to House regulations, cases concerning the immunity of deputies are referred to the Legal Committee to review and issue recommendations to the House within a two-week period.

Zu'bi told the Jordan Times that the committee had asked the House General Secretariat to delay the review of the immunity case till after the holidays but said that the House's internal laws do not allow for an extension over the set two-week period which ended Tuesday night.

According to Arab dailies, Deputy Mahmoud Kharabshah, the committee rapporteur, said the sudden meeting came after the chairman received an unsigned memo from the House's General Secretariat to reconvene and issue recommendations.

"Six out of the seven members attending voted for the lifting of immunity, one voted against, and four were absent," said Zu'bi.

"While I was reading the recommendation, two other deputies showed up and signed their approval. Later on, another deputy also signed," Zu'bi added.

In all, nine deputies agreed to lift Abbadi's immunity. Only one, Deputy Mahmoud Kharabshah, opposed the decision. The only member of the committee not present was Deputy Mohammad Azaidah, who was in Saudi Arabia performing Umra.

Once the immunity is lifted, Abbadi will face two charges of sexual assault: "committing rape" and "damaging to marital bonds."

The Constitution states that senators and deputies shall not be subject to court prosecution while Parliament is in session unless an absolute majority of the Lower House finds enough evidence to allow prosecution.

Deliberations and voting on the issue are expected to take place in the first session after

Eid Al Fitr.

Abbadi has denied the allegations levelled against him, saying that they were fabricated by certain parties seeking revenge against him.

The husband of the woman who filed one of the sexual assault cases against the deputy has dropped charges. But the Legal Committee says the husband's decision to drop charges did not mean that the case is dropped at the Lower House.

Informal sources told the Jordan Times earlier that the woman who filed the case claimed that she had an affair with Abbadi and he promised to marry her.

Since the restoration of parliamentary life in 1989, the House has never lifted the immunity of any deputy and has since turned down two similar requests involving former deputies Yaqoub Qarash and Jamal Khreishah during the 11th and 12th parliaments respectively.

Automobile business skids after decision on customs

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The government's latest decision to halt customs exemptions promised to taxi owners who turned in their old vehicles to the Customs Department for free to receive the exemption has drawn sharp criticism from taxi owners as well as car dealerships, who have described the move as hasty and irresponsible.

"The sudden halt has confused the entire car dealership sector who have made arrangements in accordance with the market's expected demands," said Ziad Bustami, general manager of the Nissan dealership, which has sold hundreds of the car manufacturer's Sunny models to taxi and service owners.

The automobile trade has become more lucrative since the government exempted public service taxis from customs, a deal offered as an incentive to thousands of taxi and service owners to help the government upgrade public transport. Owners rushed to replace their ageing cars with new ones. But the govern-

ment's recent decision has turned the industry upside down.

"We have already ordered shipments of cars, which are on the way to the country. If the government does not change its mind very quickly, that will cause a great loss for us," Bustami told the Jordan Times.

Many taxi owners fear that the halt is only the beginning and the worst is yet to come.

"I am afraid that the government wants to reconsider its decision and change us like it used to," said Mohammad Ali, of Al Subli Taxi.

Under the existing arrangements, owners of taxis and service cars may surrender their old vehicles to the Customs Department to qualify for the customs exemption on replacement vehicles.

The government granted the exemption as part of a campaign by the Ministry of Transport to modernise cars on Amman roads and generally upgrade the public transport sector to accommodate an increase in foreign visitors after signing the peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Without an exemption, many owners would not be

able to afford the cost of renewing ageing vehicles, some of which have been prowling Amman highways and highways since 1955, because of the heavy tax imposed on new cars.

A 1200 cc-engine car imposed for private use can cost as much as JD13,000.

Under the current customs exemption, a taxi owner could buy the same car for JD7,000 after turning in his old car, without compensation, to the government.

Several thousand taxis were replaced after the government offered the exemption. The Customs Department in turn sells the old cars off, mostly as scrap.

This measure was a dramatic boost to the country's public transport sector, particularly in improving the quality of the taxis and service taxis on Jordan's roads, and in replacing the Kingdom's ageing fleet of trucks. The cabinet's four-year old decision was designated to end in 2000.

According to a Customs Department official, the department had to delay granting any new exemptions because it is preparing to issue

a new customs law. The law is expected to be enacted after Eid Al Fitr, said the official.

Minister of Finance Michael Manto said the sudden stop was caused by the cancellation of the customs law and has affected public sector companies, not just privately-owned companies.

The customs official said those who turned in their cars before the end of December 1998 will be treated in accordance with the former regulations and will be exempted from duty.

People who delivered their cars after the beginning of 1999 will have to be subjected to the new law, expected to be enacted soon.

Dealerships warned that any change to three-year-old decision would deal them losses ranging in the hundreds of thousands of dinars.

"They have to grant me the exemption, otherwise, I will literally speaking, be indebted to the bank for the rest of my life," said Ali who says he took a JD7,000 loan from the bank to buy his new car. "I will lose my life's savings and I will spend the rest of my life paying back my debt to the bank."

Charity reaches out to Jordan's poor

By Suha Ma'ayeh

AMMAN — A U.S.-based relief foundation is joining hands with the government to help Jordan's growing poor, especially in rural and remote areas of the country, a foundation official said on Wednesday.

The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development has embarked on a project to feed the fasting during Ramadan, along with the Ministry of Social Development and the help of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma, who is currently heading an annual charity campaign.

Majdi Da'ood, the foundation's representative, said a team of volunteers, from the development ministry and Queen Alia Fund for Social Development began preparations before Ramadan and is now distributing food packages

in scores of impoverished villages.

The charitable organisation was created in 1989 in the American state of Texas to provide humanitarian aid through various programmes directed towards the poor and underprivileged. The organisation is also dedicated to finding practical solutions for those suffering the effects of poverty and unemployment through programmes in the areas of emergency relief, health care, social services, education and community development.

According to official figures, those struggling for their daily bread account for nearly 30 per cent of the country's 4.2 million population.

The government is under orders from His Majesty King Hussein to fight unemployment and poverty in a country where the gap between the rich and

poor is widening due to economic recession.

The government recently allocated JD773,000 to carry out a project to feed children in the primary state-run schools in poverty-stricken areas. It will start in the second scholastic semester.

The move is part of the government's approach to extend its social safety net to those worst hit by the ailing economy. Poverty and malnutrition are on the rise. Studies indicated iodine and iron deficiency and malnutrition among school children will adversely affect their performance and motivation to learn, and expose them to diseases.

"Three thousand two hundred and fifty families have received food packages containing lentils, sugar, rice, cheese, soap and other items, worth \$80,000," said the Holy Land

Foundation representative.

"[Wednesday] we distributed sachets to 50 families in Um Al Basateen, near Amman. Nearly 40 women were widowed, left without support and they had children to feed," Da'ood said.

"In some of the houses that we visited, the refrigerators were empty," he stressed.

"There are plans to launch income generating projects in the country and we will commence after registering a regional office in Jordan which will help us continue our work," he said.

In 1998, the foundation distributed food packages worth \$100,000 during Ramadan and the Eid Al Adha (Sacrifice Feast). More than \$850,000 worth of new clothing also was distributed to the poor.

Lebanon's diva returns to Amman stage after 16-year absence

By Susan Resheq



FAIROUZ: On stage Jan. 28-29 at APU

AMMAN — Sixteen years have passed since her last performance in Jordan, but Lebanese diva Fairouz will return to an Amman stage later this month for two concerts at Amman Private University.

The legendary singer will perform at the recovery of His Majesty King Hussein, who will return to the Kingdom on Tuesday and the opening of a multi-purpose sports and cultural centre at the Amman Private University.

The centre will be the "largest sports and cultural centre in the Middle East and North Africa," said Jamal Mar'i, the university's marketing manager.

But Fairouz enthusiasts will have to dig deep into their pockets to attend the event. Front row seats and other "first class" seats at the university's auditorium will come at a hefty JD100, second class at JD75 and "third class" seats will be a "mere" JD50. Organisers said there will be between 5,000 and 8,000 seats available. Mar'i contends the tickets

are "not expensive."

"Many Arab singers have performed concerts in Jordan — Wadiah Al Jazairia and the Iraqi singer Qazem al Saher — and people bought their tickets for high prices."

"Fairouz is regarded as one of the greatest singers in the Arab World," he added, describing the rush for tickets as "high."

Osama Shurshati, a student at the Amman Private University said he splurged for a first class ticket at first chance. A chance to hear the Lebanese legend is not an everyday opportunity.

"The great singer Fairouz has not been here since her concert at Jerash 1982," he said.

Others report that a rare chance to see Fairouz will, unfortunately, pass them by.

Mahmoud Salem, another student at the university described tickets as "too expensive."

"I wish I could attend, but I cannot even buy a third class ticket at the concert," he said. The revenues of the concert will be divided between Al Faisali Sports Club, the concert organiser and the Amman Private University and Fairouz.

Senators deny deliberately withholding Illicit Profit Law

By Francesca Ciriadi

AMMAN — Senators have denied recent allegations by deputies that the Upper House has deliberately withheld in its drawers an anti-corruption draft law approved by the Lower House in 1992 and passed on to the Senate.

The draft, officially named "Law Against Illicit Profit," required that officials at various levels, including ministers, deputies, and senators, submit a total assessment of their assets and properties upon appointment or election to their post.

Deputies intended that conflicts of interests, and cases in which officials or lawmakers may take advantage of their mandate to pursue their own business interests could be more easily revealed.

The draft also aimed at providing a tool to evaluate deputies and officials' illicit gains during their term in office, by comparing the assets declared at the beginning of their mandate with the declarations rendered upon leaving office.

liament rejected the law, thus opening a procedural impasse that prompted 44 deputies to petition Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali earlier this month to pressure the 40-member, appointed Senate to release the anti-corruption draft.

"It is not true that the past or current Senate wanted to stop this draft by holding it indefinitely," Senator Adee Halaseh told the Jordan Times on Wednesday.

"It is simply a procedural matter," he affirmed.

Halaseh, whose 1957-1993 career as justice culminated in his appointments to the Court of Cassation and Higher Court of Justice, maintained that the Senate and the Lower House are equally hand-tied.

"The Constitution stipulates that, since the draft has been rejected by the Upper House, the only way to revive it is by convening a joint session," Halaseh said.

Article 92 of the Constitution stipulates that "should either House reject twice any draft law and the other accept it, whether or not amended, both the Senate and the Chamber

shall hold a joint meeting under the chairmanship of the President of the Senate to discuss the matters in dispute."

"Acceptance of the draft law shall be conditional upon the passing of a resolution by a two thirds of present members of both Houses."

Halaseh conceded that other drafts have ended up rotting on the Senate's shelves for years, but rejected the notion that such occurrences indicate loopholes in the Constitution.

"I do not know what has prevented the Lower House speaker and the Upper House president from holding a joint session [on this draft until now], but obviously such sessions cannot be held every two days," Halaseh told the Jordan Times.

Until now, joint sessions usually have been convened for ceremonial purposes.

Leftist Deputy Nazih Ammurin (Karak), who was one of the signatories of last week's petition to revive the draft, stressed that regulations to ensure transparency are crucial to the development of democracy.

"Nobody can talk of democracy

when officials are not bound to a code of conduct," Ammurin noted.

In most Western countries, separate codes of conduct require that parliamentarians and ministers declare their properties and provide relevant legal documents upon they are sworn in. Independent commissions assess the amount of officials' properties when they leave office, and in most cases require officials to divest of certain interests that may conflict with their positions.

Two ministers in the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair resigned in December over a home loan that, although perfectly legal, was lent by an institution under investigation by the government and had not been declared upon the assumption of their powers.

In Jordan, Article 44 of the Constitution forbids ministers from "purchasing or leasing any government property... becoming a member of the board of directors of any company, taking part in any financial or commercial transaction or receiving a salary from any company."

While most politicians and deputies

have stressed the need for further legislation to obligate officials to declare their assets, opposition figures insist that would not be enough.

"The 1992 draft was inadequate and incomplete, because, although requiring officials to declare [their assets and income], it did not introduce any mechanism to hold them accountable," said Toujan Faisal, a prominent opposition leader and Jordan's only woman deputy.

"Deputies say the law is in the Senate and the Constitution does not allow them to get it back. True. But they could still pass another anti-corruption law, a better one than the original draft, with another name," she contended.

A combative Faisal, who held the Third District Circassian seat when the anti-corruption draft was submitted to the Upper House, gave her reading of the issue.

"I believe that senators rejected the draft because they wanted to be excluded from it," she alleged.

"How much closer can you come to a confession of corruption?"

Letter to the Editor

Clarification

To the Editor:
In your Jan. 13, 1999 issue, you published a story on page 3 with the following headline: "Writer apologises to Swiss Ambassador."

The translation seems to be sheer fabrication, for the article in Al Ra'i carried no word of apology.

It seems that the translator is illiterate and the person writing the headline is a complexed student.

I have gone over the article and found no word of apology, but words of thanks to the [Swiss] Ambassador and admiration for Switzerland.

I demand in the best journalist tradition to have those words published in the same page and place as this mutilated story was published.

— Raja Elissa Amman

What's Going On

FILM

"Conspiracy Theory" at Books/Café, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 10:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457).

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Special Christian and Muslim religious services will be conducted at different houses of worship to give thanks for His Majesty King Hussein's recovery and imminent return to Jordan. On Thursday, Jan. 14, Jordanian Muslim women will hold special afternoon prayers at the various mosques in the Kingdom. On Saturday, Jan. 16, the Roman Catholic Bishop Salim Al Sayegh will lead prayers at St. John de La Salle Church. Sharifa Zein Bint Nasser requested that prayers be organised through the Women's Affairs Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

PLAY

"Al Bab Al 'Ali" by Al Dhiffaf Group — Beit Al Karmeh (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

EXHIBITION

Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewellery at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).

The Warm Winter — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1. The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28.

N. Korea demands U.S. compensation for violating nuclear agreement

SEOUL (AP) — Cash-strapped North Korea Wednesday demanded that the United States pay compensation for violating a 1994 agreement under which the North agreed to freeze its suspect nuclear programme.

The Stalinist state also demanded compensation from South Korea and Japan for "conspiring" with the United States.

The latest demand for cash, by North Korea's official Minju Jison, came before meetings with the United States this week followed by peace talks also involving South Korea and China.

"The U.S. must make due compensations for the economic losses it has inflicted upon the DPRK (North Korea) in violation of the Geneva agreement," said the daily, quoted by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

"And the South Korean authorities and the Japanese reactionaries must pay for its criminal act of putting brakes on the implementation of the agreement."

Under the 1994 Geneva deal North Korea agreed to suspend its ostensibly civilian nuclear programme, which was suspected of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons on the side. In return the United States

promised that a consortium would supply Pyongyang with two-light water reactors.

Washington also said it would provide the famine-stricken nation with 500,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil annually until the new reactors are completed.

"In a little over four years after the signing of the Geneva agreement, the DPRK has faithfully implemented all of its obligations but the United States has violated the agreement with delaying tactics in which the South Korean authorities and the Japanese reactionaries have been involved," the KCNA said.

"The United States is wholly to blame for delays in the implementation of the Geneva agreement, and those who conspired with the U.S. cannot escape their responsibility as accomplices," it said.

It is feared the Geneva deal may break down unless the North allows U.S. inspection of an underground site which Washington suspects is being used for nuclear purposes. The U.S. Congress has threatened to halt funding for the deal if Pyongyang refuses access.

North Korea last week also demanded "tens of billions" of dollars in compensation for delays in replacing its nuclear reactors.



Sarah Flannery, 16, from Blarney, County Cork has been hailed as a mathematical genius after devising a code for sending messages by computer that is ten times faster than the one currently used to convert information so that it can be sent by email or the Internet. Flannery is pictured after winning the East Telecom Young Scientist of the Year 1999 (Reuters photo)

Sierra Leone rebel leader demands freedom for peace

FREETOWN (AP) — The jailed founder of Sierra Leone's rampaging rebel force has demanded his freedom in exchange for a cease-fire, a senior U.N. official said Wednesday.

But it was unclear yet if Sierra Leone's President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah would agree to this and other conditions, U.N. envoy Francis Okelo said.

Foday Sankoh, the founder of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebel alliance, made the demands at three-hour talks Tuesday in the Guinean capital, Conakry. The negotiations were attended by government ministers from Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Togo and Guinea.

Sankoh, who was transported to the talks in prison garb, has been imprisoned in a secret location by Sierra Leone's government since he was convicted of high treason and mass murder in October.

Okelo was flying to Freetown Wednesday to present Kabbah with Sankoh's demands, which also include official recognition of the rebel RUF, which has been accused by aid officials and civilian witnesses of mass atrocities against defenceless villagers.

"Sankoh said he is com-

pletely committed to peace and that he doesn't believe in a military solution for Sierra Leone," Okelo said.

Okelo, who represents Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said the Nigerian-led West African intervention force, ECOMOG, had pushed rebels from much of Sierra Leone's battered capital and calm was slowly returning.

The city had been heavily damaged by shelling and raging fires and casualties were "significant, although we don't know how many," Okelo said.

Rebel snipers continued to fire at ECOMOG troops carrying out clean-up operations in the city, he said.

The rebel chief, commanding the insurgency last week, rejected the idea of talks and demanded to see Sankoh.

Gen. San Bockarie promised Tuesday to free an Italian missionary priest but denied knowing about two other Roman Catholic clerics allegedly kidnapped by his fighters.

Bockarie confirmed that one priest, the Rev. Mario Guerra, was being held by his fighters for "his own safety" and would be turned over to church officials when "the security situation allows."

Bockarie, who declined

to reveal Guerra's location, said he was being held to prevent pro-government forces from killing him and then blaming it on the rebels.

The rebel leader said he knew nothing about the two other priests, Rev. Maurizio Boa and Rev. Giuliano Pini. The Vatican said the two were kidnapped last week by rebels who had promised to take them to see Guerra.

Bockarie would neither confirm or deny whether his forces were behind a Sunday attack on a government convoy in downtown Freetown that killed Associated Press cameraman Myles Tierney and seriously injured the news organisation's West Africa bureau chief, Ian Stewart.

The U.N. refugee agency, meanwhile, warned Tuesday of a possible humanitarian disaster in Freetown because hundreds of thousands of people have been trapped in their homes without water and unable to go outside to get food.

In a related development, the U.N. Security Council decided Tuesday to maintain a 70-member observer force for Sierra Leone for two more months. The force has been withdrawn to Guinea due to the fighting.

Cardinal Sin urges Filipinos to decide rationally on death penalty

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Roman Catholic Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin acknowledged Wednesday that Filipinos, including many Christians, are deeply divided over the restoration of capital punishment and urged them to resolve the dispute rationally.

Sin reiterated the church's stand against the death penalty, saying conditions for its imposition no longer exist.

"The death penalty issue has divided us," he said in a statement. "Let us sit down and discuss on the level of principles and not on the level of emotions."

Filipinos have been bitterly divided over the death penalty since Leo Echegaray, a poor house painter convicted of repeatedly raping his 10-year-old stepdaughter, was scheduled to become the first person to be executed in 23 years.

Just three hours before

Echegaray was to be killed on Jan. 4, however, the supreme court ordered a six-month delay to allow congress to review the law that reimposed the death penalty in 1994.

The court's decision set off an uproar among many Filipinos exasperated by crime. The government has asked the court to reconsider the ruling.

Monday, death penalty advocates led by President Joseph Estrada's wife, Lol, marched through Manila's financial district of Makati, demanding Echegaray's immediate execution. At least two Roman Catholic priests joined the protest, which also included Echegaray's victim.

Roman Catholic bishops have criticised pro-death penalty groups, which use children to gain public sympathy, saying the groups are spreading a "culture of death" in the Philippines.

After the supreme court postponed Echegaray's execution, bomb threats sent police bomb squads to the court building. An unknown group scattered leaflets outside the building warning of a rise of anti-crime vigilantes.

Echegaray, who was convicted in 1994, is the first among more than 800 death-row inmates to be scheduled for execution. More than 450 of those on death row were convicted of rape, including 159 who abused their own children or other close relatives.

Sin said that in opposing death penalty, the church is not supporting Echegaray.

"The church, like the protagonists of the death penalty, does not like to cuddle criminals," Sin said. But he added that "justice must always have a merciful heart." Estrada earlier turned down appeals from the Vatican, the European Union

and Canada that the Philippines not resume capital punishment, saying he was obliged to follow the law.

Roman Catholic bishops and other civic groups opposing the death penalty say there is no proof capital punishment deters crime. They also say poor people are more likely to be sentenced to death because they cannot afford good lawyers.

Advocates say capital punishment will instil fear in the hearts of criminals once executions start.

Between 1924 and 1976, the Philippines executed 84 people. In 1987, a new constitution abolished the death penalty but gave congress the option of restoring it for "heinous" crimes.

Legislators, alarmed by a rise in crime, brought back capital punishment in January 1994.



Actresses Susan Sarandon and Meg Ryan (right) pose together as they arrive for Premiere Magazine's annual Women In Hollywood luncheon Jan. 12 in Beverly Hills. The women were honorees at the event which salutes women in the entertainment industry (Reuters photo)

Adopted girls return to Taiwan to find their mothers

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — When an Australian couple adopted Lucio Gill 18 years ago, they promised relatives of her teenage mother they would bring the girl back to Taiwan someday.

Cecil and Halina Gill kept their promise last week, after a lengthy search helped by enthusiastic church workers and journalists.

Lin Chia-Hao, who married years later but does not have a second child, was all tears, only too happy at seeing a grown-up, bright-eyed Lucio.

"I am grateful for just seeing her and wouldn't dream of keeping her," she said in a telephone interview from southern Kaohsiung city, where she lives with her husband.

The meeting was one of a growing number of high-profile reunions that stir memories of a largely forgotten past, when many Taiwanese women secretly gave away babies born out of wedlock to observe the society's high morals.

About one in five of the Taiwanese adoptees return to find their biological mothers, usually in searches they keep private.

But some like Ms. Gill go public after running out of clues.

Some 4,000 Taiwanese babies were adopted by foreigners over the past two decades through

Christian and Catholic adoption organisations. Hundreds more were illegally sold to foreigners, social workers say.

All the known returning adoptees have been girls, reflecting a society that has given preference to boys because they are believed to be able to better support their parents in their old age.

Two decades later, the adoptees have grown up in Western countries, where their dark hair and yellow skin didn't seem to fit. Eventually, some became desperate to know their roots.

Meanwhile, the opening of Taiwanese society under Western influences combined with the natural bonding of mother and child have encouraged the mothers to embrace their lost daughters — all in the public eye.

Ms. Gill was the fourth Australian girl to have found her biological mother in Taiwan over the past year. But some of the stories have yet to reach a happy ending.

Hanna Andersson, a 22-year-old Swedish college student, began to search in earnest when she arrived in Taiwan in December, posting ads on apartment walls and distributing her picture to passers-by.

All she knew from her adopted parents was that she was born out

of wedlock to a 16-year-old girl from southern Taiwan. As a baby, she was given away to a Swedish priest, who then took her to a couple in Soderstjarn, Sweden.

Several women responded to her appeals, but DNA tests turned out negative.

"I wondered why I looked different when I was small, and then found out I was adopted from Taiwan," she said.

"I don't know why it is so important for me, but since then I've wanted to find my mother. Maybe she is scared because she has a new family, I'll give her time to come forward. I'll never find my peace until I see her."

The news media have followed the stories closely and actually helped a few of the young women find their birth mothers by publicising any available clues about the adoptions. In some cases, reporters were dispatched to help the search.

For the natural mothers, the reunions have become a vindication of a shameful and long-buried past in addition to bringing the joy of finding their lost children.

Ms. Gill's mother, Lin, recalled she fell in love with a fellow worker at an electronics factory. She became pregnant, but kept the secret from her parents and 10 siblings until she went into

labour.

Three days after the baby was born, an older sister told her the baby had been given away, but that the adopted parent promised to bring her back after she grew up.

"It would be considered shameful and people would look down upon me if they knew about it," Lin explained.

To the adoptees, the reunions finally resolve myths about their identities.

"It's been important for me to know where I came from ever since I was small," a shy but smiling Ms. Gill told reporters.

Kariya Wunderle, a 17-year-old Australian girl, was so troubled by her unknown identity that she says she sought consolation in heroin.

Her adopted parents took her to Taiwan last June, and the first open search for a biological mother by an adoptee in many years was widely publicised.

Weeks later, her birth mother finally overcame worries that the recognition could damage her new family. The policeman she contacted knew right away from the remarkable physical resemblance that she had to be the girl's mother.

The reunion was arranged even before DNA test results were revealed.

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Sidesteps

THE AMMAN municipality continues to make improvements within the city limits, including expanding and building new parks, constructing more tunnels to help ease traffic congestion, and opening new markets to serve various parts of the capital. One area that has been overlooked, however, is making roads and sidewalks safer for pedestrians.

The current situation in every part of the city makes it difficult for people to cross the street, walk a short distance to the local grocery store, or even take a short stroll to what public parks may be in the neighbourhood. Pedestrians downtown, crowded into tiny alleys, must negotiate ill-placed barriers obstructing their movements. Commuters on University Road have to wait interminable periods to cross the street after completing their bus rides from downtown of Ahdali. Car-dodging is the norm for anyone brave, or foolish, enough to want to visit the opposite side of the road. No one even uses the sidewalks for fear of putting out an eye by running into low branches.

Although Amman is not a very pedestrian-friendly city, there are a number of steps that could be taken to ease the plight of people trying to get around on foot. More pedestrian bridges and tunnels should be built to facilitate movement of people travelling by foot and reduce the danger of being struck by poorly-driven vehicles. Traffic lights should be set up at logical intervals to regulate traffic and give pedestrians safe opportunities to cross the street. More traffic lights are especially important for University Road, which drivers treat more like a raceway than a city street.

Finally, sidewalks should be maintained with a view to encouraging people to use them. This will entail pruning away the jungle-like plant growth that forces pedestrians to compete for space with cars on the street. To this end, we propose that citizens begin a "sidewalks for pedestrians, not trees!" campaign to press the municipality to properly maintain sidewalks. Amman's sidewalks also need to be levelled out to reduce the possibility of tripping and injury.

The Amman municipality has made many strides in making the capital a more attractive and friendly city. We ask that it does not forget those who are travelling on foot.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Faneek said there are four local issues that deserve to be debated in a national dialogue and which a government or political party should take a clear stand on. They are political democracy, economic reform, peace with Israel and rehabilitating Arab and international relations, said Faneek. Some people think political democracy is still in its first stages, while economic reform has achieved a lot, and others say the opposite. Some people say the peace with Israel came at the right time, and the Kingdom regained its land, water, borders and national security. With respect to Arab relations, Jordan has reassessed its position on the political map after the second Gulf War, placed itself at a distance to the Iraqi regime and got closer to the Gulf states and the U.S., said the writer. But there is a gap between official and public stands on the country's relations with Israel, the U.S., Iraq, Kuwait and other Gulf states, said Faneek. More progress is needed in the democratic march and on economic reform. Jordan no longer has the choice to withdraw from the peace process with Israel and the Kingdom gives priority to relations with Arabs and does not interfere in other countries' affairs, Faneek said.

Al Dustour's editorial said that in the run-up to the Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting, to be held Jan. 24 in Cairo, there is a buzz of activity and numerous meetings discussing the current situation in the region, the Ministers' Meeting's agenda and what can be expected from the conference, Jordan, which was and still is calling for the rehabilitation of Arab solidarity and common solutions, has paid a high price for its stand, said the newspaper. The Kingdom has always called for proper preparations for the Arab meetings to be made, but why the secrecy about the meeting's agenda, asked the editorial; it is as if the results are being prepared before the event. It was said during the preparatory discussions that the meeting will deliberate several issues and not only the Iraqi problem. If the meeting turns into a cause of problems rather than possible solutions to them, said the paper, it could become very dangerous.

Three cheers for Ghawwar

DURING THE Holy Month of Ramadan, a month which is dear and special in a lot of ways, our society indulges (most of the time unnecessarily) not only in the most delicious dishes, desserts and drinks imaginable (as if, paradoxically and ironically, we refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk for the sole purpose of eating and drinking at night), but also in TV entertainment programmes. Since I had the chance on previous occasions to comment on the former (that which concerns the abdomen), I wish to focus a bit on the latter (that which concerns the soul).

Both local and so-called satellite Arab stations compete, more so during the holy month than in any other, to present entertainment programmes of all sorts: live phone-in shows, contest programmes, popular songs, talks with famous personalities, historical dramas, and especially the so-called TV series — comedy series and soap operas.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with this. In a Ramadan such as this year's — when the evenings are cold, when not many can afford to go out, and when family members gather together more than in any other month — TV is a temptation which many cannot resist. The latter two in the

list of popular Ramadan programmes (historical dramas and TV series, both called "musalsalat" in Arabic) we get a great deal of. A great deal, I should hasten to add, that is — sorry to say — pure junk, worse than junk food. It is actually junk food for the soul.

The former attempt to recreate certain historical moments — both bright and dark spots in Arab-Islamic history. Good idea, good intention, no doubt; but the execution is bad, very bad. Loud music, loud voices, loud colours, didactic sermons, sentimentalised scenes of the most mindless type, the weirdest costumes imaginable and the slowest pace you can think of. As if you were playing something in slow motion for an audience that is so vulgar, slow and thick.

As for the latter, the comedy series, they are even worse. Bad jokes, stupid humour, worse than what the worst clowns present in circuses. Loud voices, didactic sermons, farcical scenes lower than the lowest farce known to mankind. Bluntness, blatancy, explicitness, overtness, shallowness, bellowness, pure nonsense. The severest insults even to the intelligence of the tiniest babies imaginable.

You wonder with what audience

in mind, such programmes have been produced. As for the audience, the picture is equally grim: thousands, millions glued to TV sets watching. Room for a lot of thought to our educators, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, and intellectuals.

In this grim, depressing, dismal picture, one person (from one Ramadan musalsal) clearly stands out — positively, that is: the talented Syrian actor (a true legend, I would say) Dureid Lahham, known throughout the past three decades to every household in the Arab World as Ghawwar.

His programme ("The Return of Ghawwar") is far from perfect. I would hasten to preface. Some of the scenes are a bit stretched out (most probably to meet the quota of the 30 days of the month), the general outline of the story is soapish, and some of the comment are unfair (they stereotype and offend unnecessarily). On the whole, however, the programme is brilliant.

For one thing, it does not insult the intelligence (a big achievement, in my opinion). For another, it is satirical comedy of the best type. It places society under a microscope and diagnoses its ills and highlights its virtues perceptively.

I like several things about it: its

A view from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

post-modernist parody (it pokes fun at the soap operas just spoken of), its subtlety (in its hints, explicit statements, overstatements, and understatements), its scenery, its music, its dialogue, its characters, and its un-didactic moral lesson.

You sit, watch, laugh, feel, vent your frustrations, almost cry, share comments with your family and friends, and enjoy. The programme is much like a good, intelligent classic tragicomedy. It does so many things to you, except one thing: depress you.

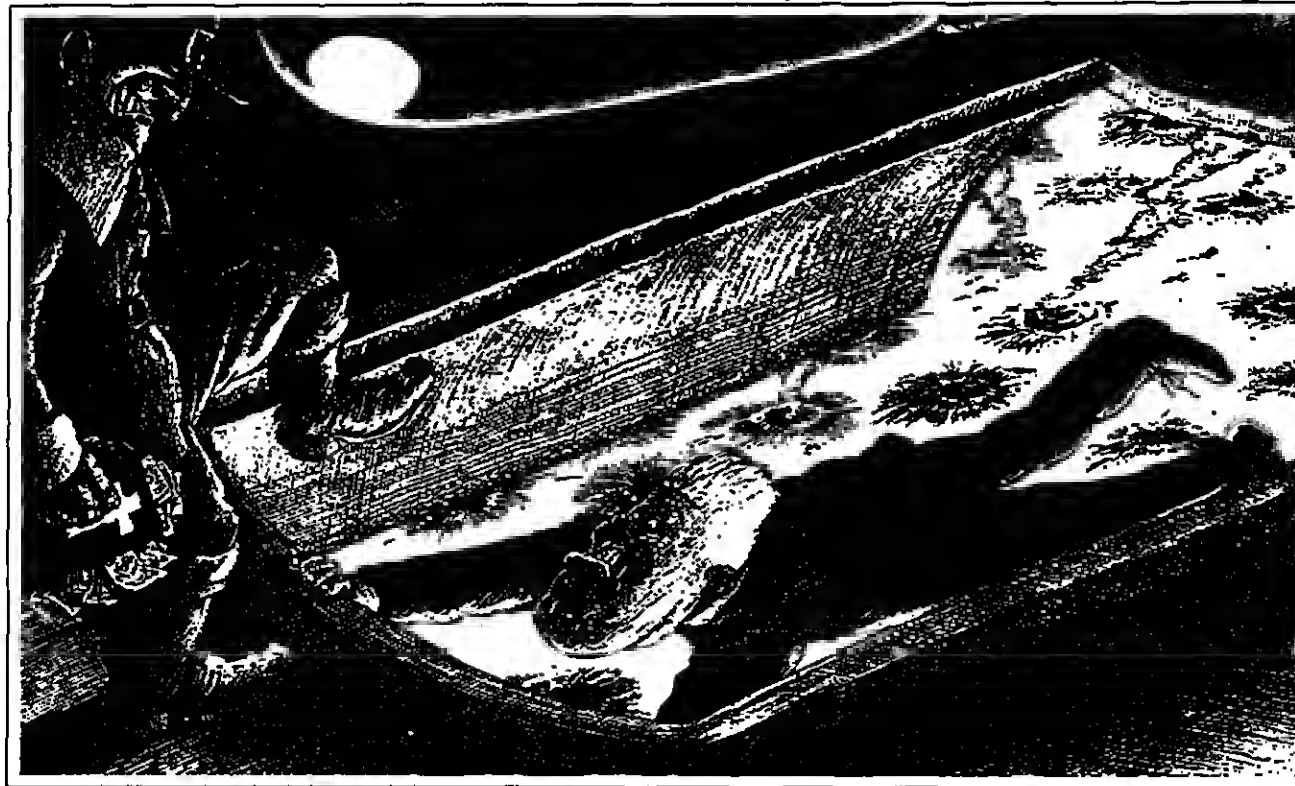
I like many of its suggested and suggestive messages. Two of which stand out. The first is that in today's world the bad — sadly

— outweighs the good, the villain outnumbers the well-meaning. The second — very valid sociologically — is that in today's society, we have almost lost the value of friendship — a value which has been deeply-rooted in our culture for a very long time. We have colleagues, cliques, transient alliances, and interest groups — but not friends. I say "almost," however, because true friendship is not entirely dead. Dureid Lahham (at once the post-modernist protagonist and director) is a genius. Not only is he a super actor himself, but he has, over the years, contributed substantially to the making of many talented actors.

More than any other actor in the Arab World (I would venture to generalise), he has also contributed to the happiness of so many people.

The man deserves better recognition and appreciation than he has so far received from our institutions. He deserves the highest Arab Oscar.

Three cheers for the man: first, for not wasting the time of the audience; second, for not insulting the intelligence or depressing the psyche; and third, for appealing to all spectators, children and adults, men and women, the highly educated and the less.



Washington and Strasbourg: The contrasting fortunes of democracy

By Gwynne Dyer

TO SAY that this week's events show American democracy on its way down and European democracy on its way up would be far too simplistic — but there is a temptation to say just that.

They are more or less impeaching a president in Europe, too. Jacques Santer, president of the European Commission, and all 19 fellow Commissioners face a vote of censure in the European Parliament that could force them out of office by the end of the week. In the new single-currency Europe, a battle is being fought to establish democratic control of the evolving federal state.

How different from Washington, where the topic that obsesses the capital seems quite removed from the concerns of normal Americans. The impeachment of Bill Clinton lays bare both the ideological sectarianism that disfigures American politics, and the burden of a federal constitution extremely intricate and self-cancelling. There is irony here, for 25 years ago Americans were the pragmatists and Europeans seemed hopelessly divided by ideology. Even sharper was the contrast between the cumbersome but time-tested democratic machinery of the U.S. federal government and the unrepresentative and stifling bureaucracy in Brussels that administered the few federal aspects of what we then called the European Economic Community.

But that was then, and this is now. The general decline in deference, and in particular its effects on the mass media, have transformed politics everywhere — mostly for the better, by making it a more open and accountable trade. But it has also raised the body count of disgraced politicians — and in the United States, for quite specific and local reasons. It has gravely undermined the political process.

In most European countries, problems with zipper control are not considered a hanging offence, and politicians are not usually forced to confess them or perjure themselves by denying them.

Moreover, if a politician does disgrace himself by local standards, he is usually out of office by the next day — whereas the U.S. federal constitution makes it practically impossible to

remove the offender. That's why we have had a year of officially sanctioned judicial voyeurism in Washington, and are now watching an utterly futile impeachment process begin in the Senate.

As Alexander Hamilton wrote in the "Federalist Papers" 201 years ago, "the impeachment process will connect itself with the pre-existing factions...and the decision will be regulated more by the comparative strength of the parties than by real demonstrations of innocence or guilt." The constitution has not changed much since then, and it is still true: the two-thirds majority of votes needed to convict Clinton in the Senate are simply not there.

Nobody would deny that the United States Senate is a vastly more powerful body, with a far stronger democratic tradition, than the European Parliament (which was not even directly elected until the 1980s). What is striking, however, is the trend lines — for as the U.S. system drifts towards paralysis and irrelevance (and the Americans who even bother to vote fall from one-half towards one-third), a pan-European federal democracy is struggling to be born.

It will not stand or fall on the outcome of this week's vote in Strasbourg (where the European Parliament actually sits, to keep it at arm's length from the bureaucrats in Brussels). Indeed, European Commission President Jacques Santer will almost certainly serve out the remaining year of his term, though he may have to sacrifice a couple of his Commissioners. As in the U.S. Senate, the two-thirds majority of votes to oust him is just not there.

But there is something important happening in the European Community. A legislature that only gained democratic legitimacy itself a decade ago is now trying to bring the appointed bureaucracy in Brussels under its control.

The specific issue is accusations of fraud and mismanagement by various Commissioners, compounded by attempts at a cover-up in Brussels. No high drama here — but the undramatic truth is that almost all the historic clashes between legislatures and official bureaucracies that have ended in the extension of democracy have been about the control of spending.

Whether the European Parliament wins or loses this battle, it is likely to win the war, for the far more integrated Europe that is being called into existence by the creation of the single currency needs more democratic institutions. As former Commission president Jacques Delors wrote recently, "It is clear that even with 15 members the European system no longer works adequately" — and there are another ten countries in the queue to join.

Apart from the European Parliament feeling its oats, plans are starting to surface for democratising the rest of the Brussels machinery that will administer the emerging federal Europe. Delors himself, for example, is urging all the socialist parties in the European Parliament to commit themselves to a single candidate for the president of the European Commission in this June's elections.

It is the EU's 15 governments who choose the European Commission, and national governments do not surrender power easily to a democratically elected but multi-national legislature. However, the European Parliament has the right to veto their choice of president — so one can see a deal where the 13 EU countries with left-wing governments agree to choose the candidate of the Strasbourg parliament (where the socialists are the biggest party).

That would give the next Commission president a democratic legitimacy that none of his predecessors have enjoyed. And though it would initially depend on a deal between consenting socialists in Strasbourg and the various European capitals, it would create a tradition that would be hard to ignore in future appointments.

It was by just such gradualism that the U.S. federal democracy took shape: a few states deciding to elect their senators rather than appoint them, for example, ultimately created irresistible pressure for a wholly elected Senate.

It will take time, but Europe is setting off down the same road. And no, democracy and the federal system are not dying in the U.S. They are just going through a very bad patch.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries

Majaj and the importance of budgets

DR. AMIN MAJAJ, a Palestinian paediatrician from Jerusalem died last week.

Few outside of east Jerusalem made note of this important man although he made a major contribution in his medical research which was recognised around the world. Majaj was also the elected deputy mayor of east Jerusalem who along with the entire council was sacked by Israel when it conquered the Palestinian areas in 1967, and extended the authority of its west Jerusalem city council to East Jerusalem as well.

While treating Palestinian refugees at the Lutheran Church's Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olive, he was conducting research in a small basement lab. Noting the blood weakness of many of the refugees he was tending to, Dr. Majaj discovered Vitamin E. This discovery in the 50s earned him a place in medical history, an article in Time magazine and a medal of honour from His Majesty King Hussein. His Majesty also appointed Majaj to the Jordanian Parliament, a post he held until the 1980s when Jordan severed its administrative ties with the West Bank which had been part of the Kingdom when Israel occupied it in the June War of 1967.

When I heard the news of the death of Dr. Majaj, I remembered an interview I had conducted with him more than ten years ago. In that interview he told me that the one session of Parliament which he always made sure he attended was the session discussing the annual budget.

The annual budget has been the hot item of discussion this week in both Jordan and Palestine. In fact the role of the parliament and, therefore, the people in approving the state budget was part of the social studies class of my daughter Tamara.

But studying an issue in school in one thing and the application on the ground is another. While in the Kingdom, the years of parliamentary experience has produced a system of discussion and debate — although sanitised and restrained — the situation in Palestine is still not up to par.

After thirty years of occupation in which the budget of the Palestinians territories was considered a state secret, the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority promised to

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttab

make things different. Three budgets ago the representatives of the Palestinian people were excited to see for the first time a budget containing expected income and expenses for the coming year.

In order to be able to see the budget, the parliamentarians had made a commitment to approve the budget so long as it was introduced to them. At the time, a number of complaints were made about the expenses in the budget and direct accusations were made about the abuse of the spending by the executive. The charges of corruption which were carried on local television stations caused the arrest of the director of one Palestinian television station because it was broadcasting the parliamentary session. The following year, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council complained that the annual budget was missing some important items in the income category. They stressed that the representatives of the people have the right to know and to approve all public income and spending. Thus, the executive was reprimanded for not declaring certain incomes.

This week, the Palestinian Legislative Council is expecting to review this year's annual budget. Word that the PNA will only submit income and not expenses has raised the blood pressure of members of the legislature who have summoned the Palestinian Minister of Finance. The only explanation for not submitting expenses is that the Palestinian executive has secrets it does not want made public.

Annual budgets are a reflection of where a country was and where it is going. If the Palestinian Authority is serious about its goal of declaring a state in May 1999 it must declare all its expected income and expenses for the coming year and listen carefully to what the representatives of the people have to say concerning it.

This

Eve

Jordan
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By Amy Henderson

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"I should like to thank Prince... for going the deep... Jordan and the for... critical monre... The Prince had one... reader (th... the people... Jordan's stability and

Society on the move

Events in the media on centre stage

Saturday, Minister of Information Nasser Judeh hosted an iftar banquet for members of the local and foreign press corps at Jabri Banquet Hall. The festive mood was further enhanced as Judeh introduced his VIP guests (all former ministers of information), respectfully recognised former information ministers not in attendance, and presented a few principals from the ranks of the official media. The intensity of the applause received by each name presented spoke volumes about just how the Jordanian press corps rated its relationship with those officials. Following the hearty laudations for popular personalities such as Leila Sharaf (a current member of the Senate) and Ibrahim Izzedine (a former deputy prime minister and now director of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation), Judeh suggested that with this sort of resounding support the two former ministers might do well to run for elections. Would that former information minister Marwan Muasher had been present, he would certainly have let out his characteristic guffaw, for the applause he received was nearly thunderous. Now when it came to the introduction of the national news agency Petra's director Abdullah Etoun, the nearly 600 journalists in the room broke into a roar of laughter. If nothing else, Etoun is known for his own special brand of humour.



APPLAUSE ALL AROUND: From left to right, Leila Sharaf, Ibrahim Izzedine and Marwan Muasher

events. Ne'mat, who was a reporter for the Jordan Times from 1983-1989, will also write articles and travel to the region for major stories. In London, he will cover Middle East issues as an Al Hayat correspondent accredited to the British Foreign Office. Ne'mat has also been reporting since 1988 for the BBC Arabic Service — that post will need to be filled. Succeeding him as Amman bureau chief for Al Hayat will be Yasser Abu Hilaleh, a former Al Ra'i political writer and a reporter with Al Hayat. Ne'mat expects to start his new job on Feb. 1, so between now and then he and his wife Rita will be packing, appearing as the celebrities at a series of farewell parties, and looking for someone to rent their beautiful home in Fuheis. Rita and sons Faisal and Karim will follow Salameh soon after he settles in. We'll still be hearing from him on the

local front, however, as Ne'mat, also known fondly as Heikel, intends to continue writing his Wednesday column in Al Arab Al Yawm.

VIEWER RESPONSE: If anyone saw the CNN report presented on Monday by chief international correspondent Christine Anagnostou on honour killings, it should be no surprise that Jordan Times crime reporter Rana Hussein, whose reports on such crimes drew the attention of the global news network, has received a flood of comments via the e-mail. The programme, Newsstand, featured Her Majesty Queen Noor who spoke in support of the need to amend Jordanian laws so that this and all other types of violence against women can be eliminated. Rana's work on

consciously reporting on crimes of honour was used to expose the various dimensions of the problem. All but one of the messages Rana has received since the airing of the report, entitled "Blood for Honour," have been supportive of her work. Phone-in comments also included some constructive suggestions on writing about the roots and associated sociological aspects involved in this complex and violent social phenomenon. As one viewer from Omaha, Nebraska, in the U.S. said, "At least writing about it will be a start."

BOUNCING BABIES: One senior colleague at Al Ra'i, Chief Editor Abdul Wahab Zingheilat, and his wife Amal celebrated the birth of their sixth child on Jan. 10. Baby Zeid

evens up the score now between the Zingheilat boys and girls joining Areej (20), Shaka (18), Nada (15), Uday (11) and Mohammad (5). Having surpassed the Kingdom's birth rate, the couple says that they have officially terminated their contract with the stork. But who can believe a journalist?

Another colleague, Agence France Presse Reporter Saad Hattar and his wife Safa have also increased their family by one. Her name is Sophie, who was born on Dec. 2, and was welcomed by big sisters Alice (5) and Atheel (3).

GET OUT YOUR SHOVELS: With the Ministry of Agriculture's nurseries tenderly nurtured eight million tree saplings, the Hays Arts Centre has announced that it will launch a national environmental campaign entitled "Towards a Green and Clean Jordan for the Commemoration of Children." The campaign will be organised in cooperation with the Amman Municipality and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). Activities include planting fruit and forest trees in selected areas of Jordan's 12 governorates.

Children of all ages are encouraged to take part in this campaign, held under the patronage of Their Royal Highnesses Prince Faisal and Princess Aliya. The campaign will run from Jan. 23 to March 4. The "Green and Clean" campaign kicks off in Wadi Qanar east of Amman where the Amman Municipality has established a national park.

The Ministry of Agriculture has also announced Arbor Day celebrations to begin Jan. 15. So get out there in the fresh air and be environmentally friendly.

Jennifer Hamurrah

Jordan stares down 'challenge of the century'

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — A symbol of the new Millennium — Y2K — swings like a pendulum across the screen of Ahmad Aburagheb's office PC.

Along with it, six counters tick away the number of months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes left until the world rings in a new Millennium.

Most importantly, Aburagheb's screen registers the number of working hours still at his disposal to solve off the much-prophesied digital armageddon — wrought by the Millennium Bug — in his corner of the globe, which happens to be Royal Jordanian Airlines (RJ).

For the uninitiated, routing the Millennium Bug, also known as Y2K, is touted as the turn of the century challenge. Most of us will never see the Bug, but may feel it in the potential havoc it may wreak in our daily lives, now heavily reliant on digitally automated systems. These systems we never hear, see or even think of most of the time, but they regulate the most mundane details of our existence: our traffic lights, our water supply systems, our airlines and air traffic, our insurance, elevators, sprinkler systems, taxation and social security systems — the list is endless.

Y2K is not even really a computer bug problem: it's a numbers problem, left over from the 1960s when computers evolved from a technology expo novelty to a fundamental pillar of government and private sector administrations. Programmers then, in order to conserve hard drive memory, embedded dates represented in two digit numbers, rather than four digits — 1999, for example, is represented only as 99. Few early computer whizzes expected their hard and software to be in use at the turn of the century, when four digits will be required to represent the year.

Although human sensibility can determine from context which century is at hand, the discrepancy can lead to confusion when an automated system interprets dates. So, when a computer using only two digits rolls over the date at midnight, December 31, 1999, it may read that date as Monday, January 1, 2000. To complicate matters, the year 2000 will be a leap year, which means February will have an extra day, only, computers won't know that unless someone tells them, and they will proceed to March while we languish in February.

Already, confused systems in France and the United States have required the long-deceased to register for kindergarten and have denied senior citizens their pensions on the grounds that they've not yet been born.

Although the anecdotes are amusing, the problems are profound, and many are even unforeseeable, says John Cunningham, a U.S. telecoms expert from telecom giant GTE now overseeing the construction of Egypt's national telecommunications network.

"In 1996, a smelting plant in New Zealand sustained major damage after its process control programme failed because the programmer didn't know it was a leap year," says Cunningham, a guest of USIS who lectured in Jordan. "The system hung up and allowed four cells to over heat. This is just an example of what can happen."

Indeed, the culture of globalisation means that the effects of Y2K may be multiplied since many systems, including those in Jordan, "interface" with systems around the world, meaning that no company, organisation or government is an island unto itself. Even if the problem is solved at home, any system linked to another abroad that is not Y2K "compliant" — or reprogrammed to handle date data properly — may be headed for trouble.

Already, major corporations have stated their intention to cease business with non-compliant companies. KLM (Royal Dutch) Airlines, for example, has said it will not fly to countries whose airports are not compliant by the year 2000.

Air travel is of particular concern since the turn of the Millennium is expected to attract die-hard travellers to the four corners of the globe and deliver an unprecedented number of religious pilgrims to the Middle East.

Aburagheb, assistant vice president of information technology at RJ, states that the airline is, so far, ahead of the game in getting "Y2K compliant."

"I'm confident that RJ is on the right track," said Aburagheb in an interview with the Jordan Times. "We have solved our problem locally and minimised any potential damage from the Y2K problem."

On December 27, RJ launched its cargo operations system as Y2K compliant. The entire process for cargo alone took 18 months. To put the effort in perspective, the system serves 300 users around the world and is linked to 45 offices abroad, which all must also be compliant. Some 380 programmes were modified.

"We are pleased with the result," Aburagheb says. "It indicates that our plan and methodologies are sound and workable."

In mid-January, RJ will test four more systems — 765 modified programmes — including maintenance and engineering, catering, inflight sales and general stores inventory.

Aburagheb says that RJ is waiting for the International Air Transport Association to issue its list of airports and airlines deemed non-compliant.

"RJ won't fly to non-compliant countries," he says. "But 'cleaning up' RJ is only scratching the surface of the problem here at home. If one considers that one aircraft alone can require checks and tests of up to 15,000 gadgets, the scope of the problem, or challenge, becomes somewhat more appreciable. So, how big is the Y2K problem in Jordan, and will it be solved at the faithful hour?"

The bad news is that no one in Jordan, or the rest of the world, really knows.

"There is a possibility that some sectors will not be compliant," says Youssef Nseir, now heading

the Y2K National Task force emanating from the National Information Centre at the Royal Scientific Society. "I worry that there are major operations, especially in the private sector, that won't be effective."

The Y2K task force has spent the greater part of the first two and a half years explaining the Bug, creating manuals for different sectors, hosting workshops and addressing any questions from organisations and businesses on how to solve their problems. But, he says, Jordan has embarked on confronting the challenge late in the game — other countries started at the beginning of the decade — and some businesses have failed to take the problem seriously.

"I have heard people say that the 'Y2K problem' is a marketing gimmick from hard and software manufacturers to get people to replace their systems," he said during a recent interview with the Jordan Times. "The problem is critical."

Nseir points to the irony that in Jordan, the public sector, often slow to respond to public needs and wants, has attacked the problem far more rigorously than private sector enterprises.

"I would say that at least 70 per cent of governmental and semi-governmental organisations have responded to our urging that this problem cannot wait and must be dealt with now," he said.

But, he says, response and compliance are two different things. So the task force has identified 30 "mission critical" — or life sustaining — sectors with which it maintains nearly daily contact to track their progress in routing the Bug. They include the energy, telecommunications, banking and finance, utilities, transport and health sectors.

How are they faring? "Not all organisations are taking this seriously," Nseir says. "Banks and telecommunications are doing alright in terms of planning. We don't know yet in terms of their compliance. But the public health sector, for example, has not taken it seriously. The Hussein Medical



City has worked very hard and taken it extremely seriously. The Ministry of Health hospitals have not, and they have a lot of equipment that requires readjustment. We are concerned about this."

"The industrial sector is also a cause of concern," he says. "Many whose machines might need to be replaced or modified, which can be expensive, are saying that they will wait and see what happens."

"I cannot emphasise enough that the cost of non-compliance will be much higher than what ever [money] might be saved now," he stressed.

Many have proffered that damage in Jordan will be limited since wide-scale use of computers made its debut in Jordan only this decade, and thus, the majority of hard and software now in use were programmed with the Millennium in mind.

"This is rubbish," says Nseir. "Whoever dismisses the problem in these terms is unaware of the problem. Equipment five years or more is too old. Even those that are one year old might not be compliant."

Compliance itself isn't a simple matter. It is related to the availability of manpower to examine, test and upgrade or replace systems; there is a direct correlation to the sheer volume of equipment that must be modified; beating Y2K to the New Year's punch is highly dependent on the vendor from whom equipment was purchased to provide solutions or replacements; and now, with the New Year lurking only 11 and a half months in the offing, it is inescapably linked to time.

What's the damage to the national wallet? Nseir isn't prepared to specify precisely, but he says, it's likely to be "in the millions."

"Maybe in the tens of millions," he adds.

What if?

By Jean-Claude Elias

chip talk

THE FIRST electronic spreadsheet for PCs that appeared circa 1984 were sometimes referred to as "What If?" programmes. The expression perfectly translated the main feature of the software. You could start by setting up a complex table of numbers and values interrelated through formulas in many different ways. Then you could stop and wonder: "What if I changed this number only?" Of course all the other values would be immediately recalculated and would therefore show you WHAT would happen IF you did this or that. Manually, without the computer, the recalculations would take much longer to perform.

Naturally spreadsheet software has become part of the daily life of most computer users and its capabilities are now well past the simple "What If" feature. Recently however, and despite all the criticism software companies are facing in terms of selling less-than-perfect programmes and attempts to monopolise the market, I couldn't but think in a similar way: "What if we didn't have at all any of these application programmes?"

For instance, what if Microsoft never released a piece of software before making sure it was perfect? What if software was more expensive? And so forth.

We can complain, envy Bill Gates success — not to say fortune — criticise Microsoft for the bugs in their programmes, but the fact is we badly need all this software in spite of the flaws and weaknesses. Somehow we must be realistic and accept the fact that we are all part of the huge testing ground for the giant software companies. As big and powerful as Corel, Oracle, Microsoft or Lotus may be, they can't do all the testing it takes to ensure a given product is perfect. Only the millions of users, working on the programmes over weeks, months and years can provide the feedback that is necessary to fine tune and improve the products.

We've become so dependent on word processing, spreadsheets, electronic diaries, databases, e-mail and Internet that the mere thought of "what if we didn't have them at all" sends chills down my spine. The price to pay, that is working with imperfect programmes and having to deal with near-monopolistic companies, is nothing compared to the benefits and advantages these programmes are bringing us.

'Netanyahu will allow settlement'

(Continued from page 1)

Previous attempts to build Moskowicz's housing project at Ras Al Amud triggered riots between Palestinian residents there and Israeli troops.

Many Israelis are concerned that Moskowicz's financial power mixed with his efforts to move more Jews into disputed sectors of the city will endanger peace in the region.

Betty Benbenisti, a 29-year-old graduate student protesting at Ras Al Amud, said Moskowicz was trying to alter reality.

"Look around, you can't take control of this area," she said.

Successive U.S. governments have opposed Jewish settlements believed to be an impediment to a permanent peace between Palestinians and Jews.

However, Forbes said he was behind Moskowicz.

"I think it's a shame that this debate has disintegrated into a political football match and it is only appropriate that all of us, that the world community, get behind this and say that this is the future of Jerusalem and the coexistence here," Forbes said.

Jordan plans tumultuous welcome for King

(Continued from page 1)

"We have to thank Prince Hassan, the Regent, for giving the deepest meaning to leadership and wisdom while he was leading Jordan and the Jordanian family during critical moments," Tarawneh told deputies on Monday.

"The Prince had one worried eye on our father and leader [the King] and another eye on the people and the problems facing the homeland... He protected Jordan's stability and the course of

its wise path and all the people are witnesses to that."

Praising God for the King's recovery and imminent return to Jordan, special religious services will be conducted at different churches and mosques around the Kingdom. Jordanian Muslim women will today hold special afternoon prayers at various mosques in the Kingdom, while on Sunday, churches will conduct services in thanks for the King's recovery.

As for the government, it was decid-

ed that each ministry would arrange its own programme for celebrating this happy event.

The Information Ministry has been busy during the last few weeks receiving requests from leading television networks, newspapers and news agencies and trying to facilitate their coverage of the Jordanian people's meeting with their leader. It was reported that CNN might carry the moment live.

The ministry has also prepared for live coverage of the Kingdom's cele-

brations, which are expected to last for more than a day.

As for the Education Ministry, it was reported that each ministry school will have its own programme for celebrating the King's return.

Associations and the private sector will mark the King's arrival in their own fashion. Some associations have decided to give their employees bonuses on their salaries.

Meanwhile, commercial banks in Jordan announced that they intend to allocate JD5 million over the next five years to establish "Al Hussein Fund for Creativity."

Sharon: A Palestine inevitable

(Continued from page 1)

The "empty areas" he mentioned could include the Jordan Valley Rift along the border with Jordan, where the sole Palestinian town is Jericho, already Palestinian-ruled. It could also include that part of the Judean desert in the West Bank.

Israel's Labour Party was long in favour of a plan, named after its author, the late Foreign Minister

Yigal Allon, which would also have Israel keep empty West Bank areas to provide a buffer between Palestinians and the Arab World.

Although he seemed to accept that a Palestinian state would emerge, Sharon was critical of former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres for urging the creation of such a state.

He told Le Monde that Israel's membership of the EU's framework programme, under which it

receives millions of dollars for research and development, had not been renewed.

"There is this unresolved question of the renewal of our membership of the European research and development programme. This smacks of interference in our internal affairs," he said.

Israeli press reports have said the EU will make a final decision this week on whether to exclude Israel from the programme for the next four years.

Brazil plunges into economic turmoil, shakes world markets

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Brazil's economy plunged into economic turmoil Wednesday following a shake-up in the central bank leadership and a de facto devaluation of the real.

Brazil's main stock index plunged more than 10 per cent in the morning on the news. The opening was delayed as a result of the resignation of central bank president Gustavo Franco, reportedly over a dispute on economic policy.

The Bovespa index moved off its lowest levels and was down 4.51 per cent around 2:30 p.m. (1630 GMT), but the ripple effects were felt in markets across Latin America and around the world.

With its new chief, Francisco Lopes, the central bank immediately announced the real's exchange rate band would shift from 1.10-1.22 to 1.20-1.32 to the dollar.

Lopes said there was no change in policy but predicted the real would be devalued between eight to 10 per cent this year.

Lopes defended the decision to widen the real's exchange rate band as "a step in the evolutionary process of the exchange rate poli-

cy," in keeping with policy followed since the launch of the Real Plan in 1994.

"Our philosophy is the same," he said. Lopes added that Brazil's foreign exchange reserves were at \$45 billion.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, trying to calm investors as capital flight this week hit \$1 billion, said Lopes' appointment did not signify a change of direction in Brazil's economic policy.

"The changes introduced this morning by Lopes are changes that will create a space for adjustments in monetary policy, in so much as this policy will move forward as out fiscal adjustments progress," Cardoso said.

Analysts here feel the real will now be trading at a more realistic level.

"The presence of Lopes in the central bank is very good, because he knows the market very well. I think Brazil's external credibility will recuperate as fiscal policy adjustments are carried out," said Ernst and Young's president here, George Roth.

"The key thing is where the Brazilian policy is going now in terms of reducing the deficit and taming inflation to get the books in

order," added Lisa Finstrom of Salomon Smith Barney in New York.

Cardoso has been trying to soothe investors during the economic tail-spin prompted by an announcement by Itamar Franco, governor of Minas Gerais state, that there would be a 90-day moratorium on debt payments.

Minas Gerais has the second biggest economy in Brazil after Sao Paulo and owes \$15.4 billion.

"We pay our debts. We honour our debts," said Cardoso, adding that Brazil had no intention of repeating a 1987 decision to stop payment on all debts. "The attitudes of the past caused stagnation in Brazil."

Nevertheless, Cardoso Wednesday called on "international banks and governments of those countries which support us (to) understand the need to increase credits that finance products from countries like Brazil."

Brazil's lower house chairman Michel Temer said the latest upheaval would not prejudice the Congress vote on the government's fiscal

package. "This may even ease (passage of the measures)," he said.

A session of both Houses of Congress was to vote on three provisional multibillion dollar measures contained in the package later Wednesday.

The package is crucial to reestablishing control over Brazil's hobbling economy, the last of the world's major eight economies to be battered by the Asian financial storm, and retaining a negotiated \$41.5 billion aid package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Cardoso said he was sure the IMF "will be of the same belief that everything we are doing is for the good of Brazil as well as for those countries whose support is necessary in a global economy."

Asia gropes for currency to match euro

TOKYO (AFP) — Asian nations are groping in the dark for their monetary future as the region's financial leaders prepare for an annual meeting with their European counterparts.

The second finance ministers' Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to Frankfurt on Friday and Saturday marks a new stage in the debate on stabilising global currency exchange rates.

But compared to the Europeans, whose monetary destiny lies clearly with the birth of the euro, Asians appear to have little idea how to escape their traditional dependence on the dollar.

Neither is it clear which currency, the Japanese yen, Chinese yuan, or even an "Asian currency unit" similar to the former European Currency Unit (ECU), could represent the region in a tripartite system with the dollar and euro.

"The euro is the big event. It is a challenge and the beginning of a new trend on the international monetary scene," said Yasuhide Tsukagoshi, international coordination director at Japan's finance ministry.

"We can learn a lot from the European monetary experience in terms of policy coordination," said the official, responsible for the ASEM portfolio in the ministry.

But the "situation is totally different in Asia as there is no Asian currency."

Tokyo is to be expected to present its own programme to ASEM, calling for exchange rate stabilisation between the dollar,

euro and yen and pushing its rearguard battle to bolster international use of the Japanese currency.

Japan, said Tsukagoshi, will make its case using international meetings as a platform, such as the Group of Seven (G-7) finance ministers' meeting in February or the next Group of Eight (G-8 plus Russia) in June.

The battle for the yen's place in the world took centre stage in Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi's tour over the past week of France, Italy and Germany in the aftermath of the euro's Jan. 1 launch.

The Japanese agenda, said one European monetary official who spoke on condition of anonymity, has been provoked by a late realisation of the risk that the yen may be marginalised.

"What is at stake is Japan's influence in Asia," the official said. But despite welcoming the new Japanese tack, he said the "yen has missed the boat."

His opinion was clearly shared by Joseph Yam, chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA, Hong Kong's form of central bank), who has reignited debate on the creation of an Asian currency.

"The time may come when we might want to consider the possibility of our own Asian currency, perhaps something along the lines of an Asian currency unit, that would form an anchor currency for our region," Yam told a Jan. 5 bankers' meeting in Manila.

An Asian currency unit, or ACU, would echo the

ECU, a forerunner for the euro.

"Despite the pre-eminence of the U.S. dollar, the Asian region as a whole lacks a viable exchange rate anchor. This is a problem that has to be addressed, and we would do well to look into it, especially once the current crisis has subsided," said

Yam, a long-time advocate of developing Asia's local financial markets.

While recognising that such a process would require much time and determination, Yam said he believed the time had come to raise the topic for conversation "at least at an intellectual level."

The first finance minis-

ters' ASEM was held in Bangkok in September 1997. Japan, partly supported by other Asian nations, launched at that meeting the idea of an Asian Monetary Fund which was shored down by industrialised nations at a G-7 finance ministers' meeting a few days later in Hong Kong.

Exchange Rates Wednesday, 13-01-99

CURRENCY	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1867	0.1927	1.8778	1.8388	0.1845	2.3444	0.2077	0.7080
SAUDI RIYAL	5.2800	1.0000	1.0212	9.9465	8.7424	1.0302	12.4205	1.1004	3.7510
UAE DIRHAM	5.1881	0.9793	1.0000	9.7422	9.5403	1.0088	12.1629	1.0776	3.6732
BAHRAIN DINAR	0.5325	1.0000	1.0236	1.0000	0.9793	1.0302	12.4205	1.1004	3.7510
QATAR RIYAL	0.5438	1.0000	1.0248	1.0212	1.0000	1.0302	12.4205	1.1004	3.7510
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4296	0.9707	0.9912	8.6558	8.4557	1.0000	12.0863	1.0881	3.6410
EGYPT POUND	4.6142	0.0822	0.0822	0.8010	0.7844	0.0822	1.0000	0.0886	0.3020
LIBYAN LIRA	21.4631	4.0548	4.1408	40.3405	36.5044	4.1774	50.3642	4.4821	15.2100
IRAN RIAL	1.4124	0.2688	0.2722	2.6522	2.5973	0.2746	3.3113	0.2934	1.0000
QATAR DINAR	0.8812	1.0236	1.0680	1.0172	1.0387	1.0615	12.0181	1.1788	0.6886
GERMAN MARK	2.3781	0.4889	0.4884	1.0000	1.0000	0.4884	5.7532	0.4839	1.6837
FRANCE FRANC	1.9455	0.3872	0.3750	3.8532	3.5775	0.3783	4.5609	0.4041	1.5774
NETHERLAND FLA	1.9780	1.5055	1.5374	14.9772	14.6868	1.5009	18.6887	1.8586	5.6470
JAPAN YEN	1.5742	0.2671	0.3034	2.9559	2.8947	0.3061	3.6904	0.3270	1.1445
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.6736	0.5058	0.5165	5.0316	4.9274	0.5210	6.2813	0.5669	1.9971
SWEDEN KRONA	11.0208	2.0602	2.1242	20.8848	20.2657	2.1430	25.6368	2.2051	7.0221
ITALY LIRA	23.5438	4.4438	4.5380	44.2101	43.2538	4.5791	55.1953	4.8801	18.6880
FINLAND MARK	48.9902	8.2314	8.4289	81.8391	80.8356	8.5103	114.8589	10.1684	34.6270
AUSTRIAN SCHILLING	2.2177	0.4186	0.4274	4.1843	4.0780	0.4312	5.1990	0.4806	1.5701
SPAIN PESETA	3.8537	0.7463	0.7621	7.4241	7.2703	0.7688	9.2889	0.8212	2.7962
CYPRUS POUND	2.8836	0.5085	0.5173	5.0393	4.9348	0.5219	6.2914	0.5574	1.9009
ALGERIA DINAIR	16.6780	3.1480	3.2146	31.3178	30.6885	3.2431	39.0893	3.4641	11.6886
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1463	0.4031	0.4137	4.1893	4.0780	0.4174	5.0318	0.4458	1.5196
EURO	1.2159	0.2295	0.2344	2.2833	2.2359	0.2364	2.8508	0.2526	0.8659

CURRENCY	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.3400	0.5888	0.7280	0.1771	0.8973	0.5271	5.9882	1.1816
GERMAN MARK	0.0088	1.0000	0.3622	0.4427	0.1080	0.5471	0.3214	3.6580	0.7080
FRANCE FRANC	1.8837	2.7813	1.0000	1.2224	0.2662	1.5107	0.8175	10.1008	1.9588
NETHERLAND FLA	1.9774	2.9878	0.3181	1.0000	0.2539	0.7280	0.2832	1.6837	0.6886
FINLAND MARK	5.9470	9.2011	3.3538	4.8998	1.2000	5.0668	2.9199	33.8773	6.5860
JAPAN YEN	111.4000	182.7790	66.1935	80.9133	19.7361	1.0000	58.7485	688.6808	129.4603
HOLLAND GUILDER	1.8971	3.1113	1.1286	1.3773	0.3380	1.7022	1.0000	11.2612	2.2031
SWEDEN KRONA	7.8027	12.7954	4.8343	5.8648	1.3817	7.0011	4.1128	48.8057	8.0336
ITALY LIRA	16.9680	27.3371	8.9002	12.1818	2.9518	14.5585	8.7594	105.3714	18.6880
NETHERLAND FLA	34.5470	55.7883	20.5885	25.1284	6.1319	31.0895	18.2523	207.7330	42.2221
AUSTRIAN SCHILLING	1.5701	2.5750	0.9325	1.1395	0.2780	1.4068	0.8275	6.4163	1.2618
SPAIN PESETA	2.7882	4.5907	1.8252	2.0322	0.4957	2.5118	1.4755	18.7923	3.2516
CYPRUS POUND	1.9000	3.1180	1.1285	1.3794	0.3380	1.7048	1.0015	11.2644	2.2070
ALGERIA DINAIR	11.8080	18.3851	7.0151	8.5727	2.0910	10.5849	6.2241	70.8381	13.7183
CANADA DOLLAR	1.5198	2.4921	0.9025	1.1032	0.2691	1.3625	0.8010	9.1163	1.7852
EURO	0.8609	1.2118	0.5113	0.6250	0.1524	0.7724	0.4838	5.9846	1.0000

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

CURRENCY	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT	UNIT
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.3400	0.5888	0.7280	0.1771	0.8973	0.5271	5.9882	1.1816
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EURO	0.8609	1.2118	0.5113	0.6250	0.1524	0.7724	0.4838	5.9846	1.0000

STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST	CHANGE	PRECIOUS METALS	METAL	ASK	BID
FRANKFURT	DAK	5200.10	5270.80	-70.50	GOLD	387.80	388.30	
PARIS	INDEX	10711.56	10634.27	77.29	SILVER	5.17	5.20	
LONDON	FT-100	5147.20	5101.20	46.00	PLATINUM	330.00	337.00	
NEW YORK	DJ INDUSTRIAL	8474.08	8479.89	-145.21				
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	594.59	594.03	-0.44				
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	698.85	707.32	-7.47				
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1239.54	1238.81	-0.47				
TOKYO	NIKKEI-225	13403.00	13380.97	42.83				
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	4100.70	4201.80	-101.20				
FRANKFURT	COMEXGOLD	4551.25	4551.25	0.00				

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Tourist arrivals to Israel decline by 4.2 per cent in 1998

TEL AVIV (R) — Incoming tourist arrivals to Israel fell 4.2 per cent last year to 2.198 million visitors, making the third straight year of declining tourism, the Central Bureau of Statistics has said.

Tourist arrivals peaked at 2.53 million in 1995. The bureau said tourism did not show any firm trend over 1998. In the first quarter of 1998, the number of arrivals continued a declining trend that began in August 1997. Arrivals picked up in March-September but stabilised at about 135,000 a month in the final quarter of the

year, the bureau said. The bureau said the number of overseas tourists flying into the Red Sea resort of Eilat declined more sharply than overall tourism. It said arrivals to Eilat were down 14 per cent to 132,000 visitors.

Tourists coming from neighbouring Arab countries were also down more sharply than overall tourism, with the number of visitors falling 13 per cent to 376,300. The bureau said the figure included third-country tourists returning to Israel after side trips to neighbouring countries.

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

1 Conrad and Cotten

8 Thoroughly soaked

15 Attire

16 Military decoration

17 French castle

18 Man of the ballet

19 Barbie's beau

20 scream therapy

22 "Little Man"

23 Touched down

25 Barracks beds

26 Gun lobby, briefly

27 In of

28 Anglo-Saxon theologian

29 Ghost

31 Preservers of a sort

33 Thomas

35 Lennon's Yoko

36 Spherical object

37 Places money in trust

41 Marine facilities

45 Dental-care product

46 Favorsites

48 Hautboy

49 Passing fancy

50 French pronoun

51 Warbled

52 Holiday lead-ins

54 Gilbert and Sullivan opera, with "The"

57 Totally

58 Inevitable

60 Mild depression

62 Cloying sentiment

63 Add pizzazz

64 Greenstreet and others

65 "Mommie"

DOWN

1 Doglike predators

2 Laertes' sister

3 Cocker

4 Swallow

5 Private sch.

6 Get an earful

7 Artificial

8 Puts to sleep

9 Indescent gems

10 Actor Duryee

11 "Desire in the"

12 Mrs. Roosevelt

13 Proton partner

14 Puns of luck

21 Contemporary

24 Private

25 teachers

28 Hill crest

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Pharmaceutical exports decline

**** EXPORTS OF medicine fell 26 per cent during the first three-quarters of 1998, the Central Bank of Jordan has said. The loss was valued at JD26 million (\$36.6 million), the bank's monthly bulletin said. Nearly all of Jordan's medical exports go to Arab countries. Last year's fall was due to the effects of the world recession, the head of the Jordanian Pharmacists' Association, Abdul Rahim Issa, explained.**

Saudi Binladen International Group awarded Four Seasons Hotel construction project.

**** A CONTRACT was signed this week at the head office of the Arab Jordan Investment Bank in Amman for the construction and maintenance of the Four Seasons Hotel. Signing the JD25.3 million contract were Abdul Qader Al Qadi, chairman of the Mediterranean Tourism Investment Company (MeTICO) which owns the hotel and Omar Binladen, the general manager of the Binladen International Group which will construct the hotel in cooperation with Jordanian contractors.**

The Binladen Group of Saudi Arabia was one of six international contracting companies which has submitted bids for the Four Seasons Hotel project which, under the terms of the contract will be constructed in 24 months.

MeTICO chairman Al Qadi said the Four Seasons Hotel will be constructed in an excellent location on the Fifth Circle in Jabal Amman on an area of 14,000 square metres. The hotel will consist of 200 rooms and suites built and furnished in accordance with the high standards of Four Seasons International specifications - Five stars plus. In addition, the hotel will have three restaurants, conference rooms, large ballroom for banqueting and weddings, shopping arcade and a service centre for businessmen.

The hotel will be managed and operated by the renowned Four Seasons-Regent Hotels and Resorts which manages 48 hotels in 30 countries worldwide. Plans are under way to construct several Four Seasons Hotels in Arab countries. The Four Seasons Hotel constructed in Amman will be the first in this chain.

Al Qadi added that MeTICO is a public shareholding company with the main shareholders being Arab Jordan Investment Bank, Arab Jordan Investment Company, Kingdom Establishment which is a holding company owned by the well-known international investor Prince Al Waleed Ben Talal. Four Seasons Company in addition to prominent individual Arab investors.

Al Qadi pointed out the fact that Arab and foreign investors were willing to invest in this important project in Jordan is an indication that Jordan has a good investment environment which will be very encouraging for the attraction of more foreign investment for other projects in Jordan. Such projects will be positive for the Jordanian economy and will reduce unemployment in addition to other direct and indirect benefits, he stressed.

Arab Jordan Investment Bank (AJIB), being an investment bank, has acted as a financial advisor for MeTICO. AJIB established MeTICO and sourced investors to subscribe to its capital of JD15 million. The bank was able to attract investors from outside Jordan with the share of non-Jordanians in the company being 50 per cent of its capital.

Beirut airline sets course for profits

BEIRUT (R) — Since Fadi Saab took charge of Trans Mediterranean Airways (TMA) at the end of 1996, the Arab World's only all-cargo airline has gone from relentless decline to predictions of a profit this year.

"We had a mainframe computer the size of this

hall," the long-haired chairman said at the Beirut hotel where his sales agents were holding their annual meeting this week.

"There were no major clients. Strikes made our business a stop and go affair. Our capital was \$6,000 and we have not hired anyone in 20 years," he added.

Saab convinced Lebanese Air Investment Holdings, TMA's owners, to raise the firm's capital to \$40 million in 1996 and reduced staff to 380 from 600. Today, he said, the airline boasts modern information technology and ISO 9002 quality standards.

"We reduced our debt drastically to a few million dollars and we are on course to return to profitability this year," said Saab.

However, an ageing fleet stands in the way of achieving the lean operation he wants. Functioning aircraft have been reduced to five Boeing 707s after one was retired for use as spare parts at the end of last year.

At its height just before the 1975-1990 civil war TMA was one of the world's major freight carriers with a staff of 2,000 and a fleet approaching 20 aircraft.

Maintaining and fuelling the Boeing account for 60 per cent of TMA's operating expenses, said Saab. He plans to lease more aircraft this year and use the 707s

for African routes as a prelude to their retirement.

Saab said he received offers to hire DC-8s, DC-12s and Airbus 300-B4 which can carry 60 tonnes compared with 40 tonnes for the ageing Boeing.

Despite overcapacity in the industry and an economic slowdown in Lebanon, Saab said his fleet had a 82 per cent load factor last year compared with a 60 per cent average worldwide.

"We manage each departure with sophisticated analysis. Every flight makes a positive contribution to our balance sheet," said the 42-year old chairman, who was hired after presenting TMA owners with a restructuring plan as a consultant.

TMA, founded in 1953, is the only freight airline licensed to fly in and out of Beirut. It accounts for 43 per cent of the 55,000 tonnes handled by the airport annually, competing with passenger airlines which carry cargo in their belly.

Saab said the former government of Rafik Al Hariri gave his firm a concession

to build a \$12 million cargo terminal with a capacity to handle 140,000 tonnes annually. He expects the 12-month project to start this year once the new government familiarises itself with agreements signed by its predecessor.

Saab said TMA was strengthening its Beirut hub while seeking new routes. "The Asian market remains the fastest growing. We must expand to the Far East and North America," he emphasised.

Saab plans by June to have a weekly flight to Shanghai, where he obtained traffic rights in August. An official agreement has also paved the way for flights between Lebanon and Canada, he said.

Europe accounts for half of TMA's business. The carrier flies to over 25 destinations but is banned as a Lebanese company from flying to the United States.

Worldwide air cargo business grew 10 per cent last year but capacity increased 16 per cent. Middle East traffic went up six per cent, said Saab.

A.F.M. TRADE Wednesday, 13-01-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company Open Price Close Change

BANKS

ARAB BK	216.000	217.000	+0.93%
INTL BK	1.640	1.630	-0.61%
CAIRO AMMAN BK	2.880	2.760	-3.51%
BK OF JO	1.280	1.230	-0.00%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.470	1.440	-2.04%
THE HOUSING BK	2.740	2.740	0.00%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.630	1.640	+0.61%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.660	1.660	+1.81%
JO. INVEST. BK	1.370	1.340	-2.19%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.640	0.640	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 282.880 POINT +0.69%

INSURANCE

MIDDLE EAST INS	3.450	3.450	0.00%
JO. FRENCH INS	2.700	2.700	0.00%
ALIA INS	1.110	1.160	+4.50%

INSURANCE INDEX 126.370 POINT +0.22%

SERVICES

ELECTRIC POWER	1.680	1.700	+1.19%
IRBID ELECTRICITY	1.700	1.710	+0.59%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.790	0.790	0.00%
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.260	0.270	+3.85%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.900	0.900	0.00%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS. &	1.940	1.940	0.00%
JO. INVS. HOLDING	0.930	0.960	+2.15%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.140	1.170	+2.63%

SERVICES INDEX 110.790 POINT +0.31%

INDUSTRY

AT-TANKEEP	1.100	1.100	0.00%
CEMENT	3.370	3.290	-2.37%
PHOSPHATE	1.720	1.810	+5.23%
ARAB POTASH	3.240	3.400	+4.94%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.550	10.550	0.00%
THE IND. COMML. AGRIC	1.080	1.080	0.00%
WORSTED MILLS	6.060	6.760	+11.55%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.810	2.880	+2.49%
TABACCO & CIGARET	1.210	1.220	+0.83%
NTL. STEEL	0.480	0.500	+4.17%
RAFIA	0.630	0.630	0.00%
JO. STEEL	0.960	0.960	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.880	1.880	0.00%
CHLORINE	1.220	1.220	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.780	0.800	+2.56%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.320	0.320	0.00%
NTL. CABLE	0.640	0.630	-1.56%
SULPHO-CHEMICALS	0.380	0.380	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.230	1.280	+4.07%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.660	0.660	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	1.000	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.440	0.460	+4.55%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.630	+1.61%
NTL. ALUMINIUM	0.690	0.690	0.00%

INDUSTRY INDEX 84.280 POINT +1.62%

PARALLEL

EXPORT BK (75	0.890	0.880	-0.00%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.390	0.410	+5.13%
UNION INVS. CORP	0.700	0.700	0.00%
AL-EBBAL	0.790	0.790	0.00%
AL-SHARA	1.030	1.030	0.00%
AL-DAWLAH	0.690	0.690	-1.69%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.430	0.410	-4.65%
NAMICO	0.280	0.280	0.00%
ZIMMEL EAST PHAR (30	0.600	0.600	-3.33%
AL-NAZI	0.640	0.640	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.210	0.200	-4.76%
INTL. CERAMIC	0.400	0.390	-2.50%
NUTRI DAR	0.730	0.710	-2.74%

GRAND INDEX 174.61 POINT +0.67%

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, THURSDAY 14, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You're lucky, so you might as well push for what you want next. You could run into a setback, but don't let that stop you. Once you get around that temporary condition, you'll be off and running again. You start out well, and your overall outcome looks like its going to be successful, so take any hassles in stride.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Today you could be tempted to take a financial risk, which is unusual for you. A case of buyer's remorse could crop up, but if you've done your homework, you should be able to make a good assessment. Don't panic because you're buying something more expensive than usual. If its going to last longer, it really is a good investment.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Your best teachers today are people you know well, including your spouse and dearest friend. You don't want anyone privy to how much you don't know, but today, let people in on that deep, dark secret. Talk about things you don't understand and let others coach you for a change. You'll find it relaxing, once you get into it.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) The worst is over, and now all you have to do is clean up the mess. You don't have to do it all by yourself, either. Get a co-worker to help you. Guilt is a pretty effective means for doing that, and you're an expert at gaining sympathy. If that doesn't seem to work, just come right out and ask.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The work you've done lately is bringing you attention. Make sure you look sharp. People with money and power are giving you the once over, and you may not realise when they're watching. Its always best to assume somebody's looking. There's nothing to worry about, though. You'll have a great time today, and that's the best way to add.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 21) What's going on at your place? It could be a lot of fun, but it looks like there's also a mess involved, and that's a little irritating. You might be getting antsy to straighten things up, and that's good. You'll push the others on your team into getting their stuff in order, too.

LIBRA: (September 22 to October 21) You can still do a little more homework before you launch your next project, but you'd better hurry. By tomorrow, you should have whatever it is well under way. You're being drawn in that direction by unseen forces, so you don't have to worry about what its going to be. That should become obvious relatively soon.

SCORPIO: (October 22 to November 21) Looks like a raise is possible, or a better job offer. You don't have to sit and wait for it, either. You can put on a little pressure, if you know where to push. You probably do, too. If you're like most Scorpios, you've been thinking about this for quite some time. Go ahead and play that ace you've been holding.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You should be able to get farther today than you've ever gone before. You're doing well on your own, but you need a little extra boost to go over the top. You'll get that from someone near and dear to you, perhaps a close family member. If you can get that person onto your side, you've got the whole game won.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Somebody's leaning over your shoulder, watching your every move. Make sure you're looking good, minding your manners and saying only nice things. If you're a true Capricorn, you talk at deferring to people who think they're important. This time, however, it'd be wise to watch your Ps and Qs. The walls have ears.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You and your team are red hot today. You will have some minor difficulties concerning finances, but you'll bounce right over them. As concerning finances, but you'll bounce right over them. As concerning finances, but you'll bounce right over them. As concerning finances, but you'll bounce right over them.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're lucky today, but that doesn't mean everything is going to go easily. In fact, you could take a direct hit. A person you respect and admire is rather upset right now, and might take it out on you without even meaning to. If that happens, don't take it seriously. It probably has nothing to do with you. Just roll with the blow.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz.

Lucent Technologies buying Kenan Systems

MURRAY HILL, New Jersey (AP) — Lucent Technologies, the huge telecommunications technology concern, is buying Kenan Systems Corp., which makes software for billing and for dealing with customers, for about \$1.5 billion in stock.

Meanwhile, Lucent was reportedly on the verge of a much larger deal for Ascend Communications Inc., a computer networking supplier based in Alameda, California.

The Financial Times of London said Lucent and Ascend were near a merger that would be worth \$16 billion and that sources close to the talks who said a deal might be announced as early as Wednesday.

USA Today reported Lucent was on the verge of a deal for Ascend valued at more than \$1.5 billion.

Both companies declined comment to The Associated Press.

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Steffi Graf continues comeback trail in Sydney

SYDNEY (AFP) — Former World No. 1 Steffi Graf continued her comeback from an injury-plagued 1998 Wednesday, beating American Serena Williams to reach the quarter-finals of the \$750,000 Adidas International.

The 29-year-old Graf played only a handful of tournaments in 1998 because of a series of injuries after being out for most of 1997 due to injury as well.

But she came back with a fury late last year and began this year ranked No. 9 in the world after winning two of the last three tournaments she entered and 12 of her last 13 matches. She continued that roll against Williams, beating the American teen-ager 6-2, 3-6, 7-5, to reach the quarter-finals of the Australian Open warmup where she will face Venus Williams, the elder of the two sisters.

Graf, who beat Japan's Ai Sugiyama in the first round, took the first set easily 6-2, breaking the 17-year-old Serena Williams' first two service games to take a 4-0 lead.

Williams, who reached the semi-finals of last year's tournament by beating current World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport before losing to eventual winner Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in the semis, came back to win the second set 6-3.

The two traded breaks to open the third set before Graf exerted her authority to close out the closely fought final set 7-5, breaking Williams' serve to win the match.

The No. 5 ranked Venus Williams could be Graf's toughest match in the lead-up to next week's first Grand Slam of the year.

Venus Williams overpowered South Africa's Amanda Coetzer 7-6 (7-5), 6-2 to win the right to face Graf.

Graf said facing Serena would help her prepare to face her sister, given their similar playing styles. But she said: "It's going to be difficult. I lost a lot of energy today but it's going to be a new day and it depends a little bit on how I recuperate overnight."

Serena Williams said Graf had appeared fit on the court but faced a tough opponent in her sister, especially following her own defeat.

"She's extremely fast, she's moving well, she's playing pretty good," Serena said of her sister.

"I also think that Venus has a little more desire to win, especially since things didn't go so well for me."

The winner of 21 Grand



Venus Williams of the USA gives everything as she returns a shot to Amanda Coetzer of South Africa in their second round match at the Sydney International. Williams beat Coetzer in straight sets 7-6, 6-2 and will meet Steffi Graf in the quarter finals (AFP photo)



17 year old Australian Lleyton Hewitt, who ranks No. 104 in the world, displays a strong backhand that helped defeat Nicolas Kiefer of Germany, who ranks 36, at the Sydney International. Hewitt beat Kiefer 6-4, 6-2 (AFP photo)

Slam singles titles. Graf spent the month of December in Florida working on her fitness and preparing for an assault on a fifth Australian Open title. She said she felt strong physically although she had found the heat draining in Sydney and felt good generally ahead of next week's Australian Open.

Elsewhere in the women's draw, Russian bombshell Anna Kournikova served her way out of the tournament, losing 6-1, 6-2 to eighth-seeded Dominique Van Roost of Belgium.

Kournikova served 16 double faults in the match, four in one game alone, and vowed to focus on her serve during her layoff before the Australian Open.

"I just need to get my rhythm back," she said. "Also mentally I just have to prepare and learn not to concentrate on it too much."

Van Roost will face former World No. 1 Martina Hingis in the quarter-finals Thursday.

Defending champion Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, who had a bye in the first round, beat Germany's Anke Huber 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 to win a berth in the quarter-finals where she will face Austrian Barbara Schett.

World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport beat fellow American Mary Joe Fernandez 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to get into the quarter-final round where she will face Switzerland's Patty Schnyder who overran Slovakia's Karina Habsudova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

In the men's draw, top seed and world No. 3 Alex Corretja overcame Switzerland's Marc Rosset 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) while fellow Spaniard Albert Costa beat American Jan-Michael Gambill 6-3, 7-5.

Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten beat Australia's Todd Woodbridge 6-4, 6-0 and Australian teen-ager Lleyton Hewitt, who ousted World No. 4 Pat Rafter in the first round, continued his run-up to the Australian Open, defeating German Nicolas Kiefer 6-4, 6-2.

The 17-year-old Hewitt will face American, Todd Martin in the quarter-finals. Martin beat Argentina's Mariano Puerta 7-6 (10/8), 6-4.

Austrian Thomas Muster beat French Open champion Carlos Moya 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 to face Australian Jason Stoltenberg who beat sixth-seeded Dutchman Richard Krajicek 6-3, 6-4.

Fourth-seeded Sarah Pitkowski of France joined her in the last eight, beating Israel's Anna Smashnova 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 in a long baseline duel.

With Nathalie Dechy having progressed Tuesday, France has three players in the quarter-finals.

Black, younger sister of Zimbabwe's Davis Cup brothers, Byrre and Wayne, was always in control of her match. Her 6-3, 6-3 win means only four of the eight seeds have survived to the last eight.

Australia's Nicole Pietrangeli and American Amy Frazier were to decide the final quarter-finalist later Wednesday.

Agassi downs Korda

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Andre Agassi took advantage of Petr Korda's agonising over a drugs furore on Wednesday as he staked a claim to be one of the favourites for next week's Australian Open.

Agassi crushed the reigning Australian Open champion 6-2, 6-1 in just 56 minutes at the Kooyong Classic exhibition event.

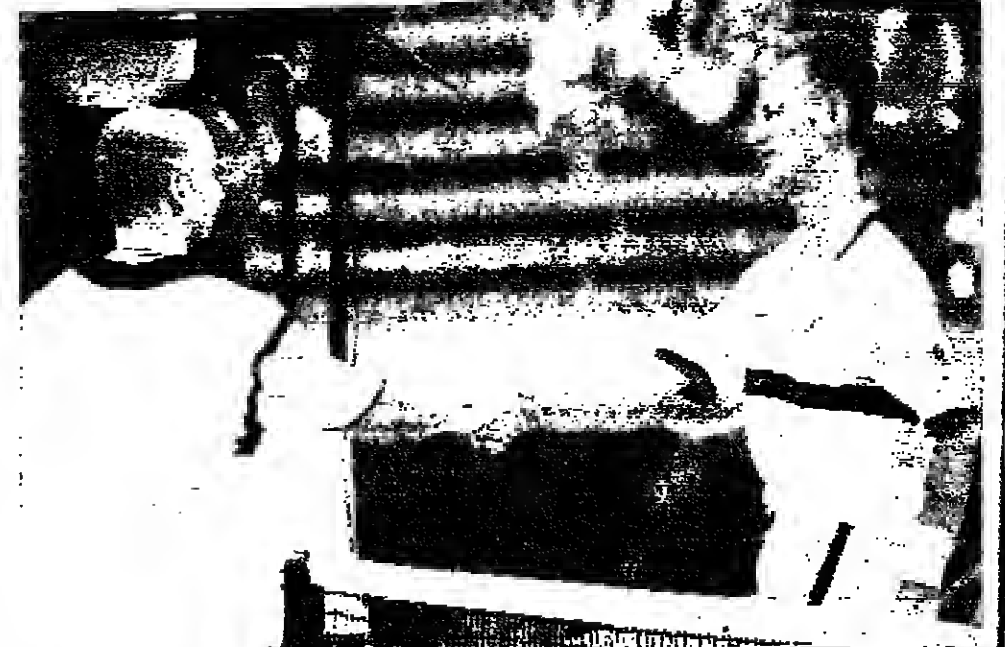
Korda faces a compulsory Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) meeting here on Saturday, with fines for players who do not amend, to trash out his lenient punishment after failing a drug test.

And the inner turmoil Korda is experiencing was evident when his serve was broken five times by Agassi.

"My legs were stiff, I've been working hard these last days and after the long journey coming here and working hard my legs are not to the condition I want, but I have another few days to work, to loosen them up and gain the speed again," Korda said.

The 30-year-old Czech has vowed he will take part in the Australian Open next week and insisted that he has nothing to hide over his drug failure.

Korda tested positive for steroids at last year's Wimbledon but it was kept quiet until an International Tennis Federation (ITF) appeals committee only docked his Wimbledon



Andre Agassi of the USA (L) shakes hands after defeating Petr Korda of the Czech Republic (R) in their match at the Kooyong Classic in Melbourne. Agassi defeated Korda 6-2, 6-1 who is facing pressure from fellow players and the ITF after returning a positive drug result at last year's Wimbledon tournament. Kooyong is a round-robin event which is used by the top players as a warm-up event for the 1999 Australian Open (AFP photo)

prize-money and computer points from the tournament.

Many players were furious that no ban was imposed. But the ITF now says it will challenge its own committee's verdict and press for a ban.

Korda was happy to let Agassi take the spotlight at the traditional Australian Open warmup event.

Agassi, who beat Pete Sampras for the 1995 title, looked in great shape as took advantage of Korda.

The flamboyant American, whose game peaked when he overtook Sampras as world number one in April 1995, has worked his way back to number six in the world after a disastrous 1997 that saw him tumble outside the top 100 players.

"I feel more ready now than I have in a long time," said 28-year-old Agassi, now in his 15th year on the

Tour.

"Last year I got so caught up in the day-to-day grind of what I needed to do that when it really came down to being in physical and mental peak form for the big ones I was a little behind on the eight-ball."

All of a sudden when the pressure was on to really step it up it really surprised me. I wasn't ready for it."

"Now it's different. now I'm in a position where I can direct all my energies towards the big matches, that's a nice luxury when you spend the year away from it, you appreciate it a lot more."

Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, a winner at last week's Australian Hardcourt championship, shaded Croatia's Goran Ivanisevic 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), while Australian Mark Philippoussis came from a set down to beat

Englishman Tim Henman 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Michael Chang fought back from losing a first set debreaker to overtake Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 7-5.

Ivanisevic is battling back pain as he builds up to next week's Open.

The World No. 12 Croatia picked up the win while playing in the week where he was by eventual Germany's Rainer Schuettler in the quarter-finals.

Ivanisevic had a workout before going to Enqvist.

"I have some back problems from Doha so I'm moving 100 per cent, I'm hoping to get rid of the pain before Monday and hope everything is fine."

Ivanisevic said.

French trio in Tasmanian International quarters

HOBART (AFP) — Former winner Julie Halard-Decugis made it a French threesome in the quarter-finals of the Tasmanian International women's tennis tournament here Wednesday with victory over Ukrainian Elena Tatarkova.

The French top seed won 6-3, 6-4 and will meet Zimbabwe youngster Cara Black, who knocked out Chinese eighth-seed Fang Li in straight sets.

Halard-Decugis, who won here in 1996, and Tatarkova both produced some wonderful shots but mixed them up with too many errors.

The top seed was 1-3 down in the first set after a string of mistakes before reeling off five straight games.

Tatarkova raced to a 4-3 lead in the second set before Halard-Decugis again steadied and rounded off a comfortable victory.

Fourth-seeded Sarah Pitkowski of France joined her in the last eight, beating Israel's Anna Smashnova 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 in a long baseline duel.

With Nathalie Dechy having progressed Tuesday, France has three players in the quarter-finals.

Black, younger sister of Zimbabwe's Davis Cup brothers, Byrre and Wayne, was always in control of her match. Her 6-3, 6-3 win means only four of the eight seeds have survived to the last eight.

Australia's Nicole Pietrangeli and American Amy Frazier were to decide the final quarter-finalist later Wednesday.

Seles Open record faces stiff test

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Monica Seles said Wednesday that competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There are probably 10 players in the women's draw who are a chance to win it," she said here.

"I put this year up with 1991 in terms of quality and it is great there are so many players in with a chance."

Seles has won 28 matches at the event and claimed the women's title on each of her four visits here in 1991, 92, 93 and 96.

She missed 1997 through injury, while last year she opted out for personal reasons.

Despite Seles' incredible

record at the Open, she knows the depth of competition will make it far more difficult this time.

"There will probably be a couple of floaters in the draw," she said.

Seles had to take more than a year off after being stabbed by a Graf fan during a Hamburg tournament in 1993 and her father and coach died last year.

But she is determined to get established again to add to her nine Grand Slam victories — four Australian, three French and two U.S. Opens.

NZ veteran thrashes Russian hopeful

AUCKLAND (AFP) — Revitalised New Zealander Brent Steven stormed into the quarter-finals of the Auckland Open international tennis tournament here Wednesday with a straight sets 7-5, 6-2 win over Russian teenage prodigy Marai Saffin, NZPA reported.

Despite a 91-minute rain break in the second set when Steven, 11 years older than the 18-year-old Saffin, had the youngster on the rack with three break points at 15-40, he carried on where he left off to win convincingly.

Also into the quarter-finals was second-seeded Spaniard Felix Mantilla who came from a slow start to beat a game Romanian Adrian Panaitescu 6-3, 6-1, 6-4.

Eighth seed Dominik Hrbaty of Slovakia had to fight hard to put away Brazilian Fernando Meligeni 7-6 (7/2), 7-5 to get through while Romanian Andrei Pavel took a straight sets win

over Spain's Fernando Vicente 6-3, 6-4 and Dutchman Sjeng Schalken saw off Czech Daniel Vacek 6-4, 6-4. But the stellar performance for local fans was that of world 100-ranked wild card Steven.

He started the tournament by seeing off third seed and 26th-ranked South African Wayne Ferreira in the first round before cutting down the big serving Russian Wednesday.

Into his fifth quarter-final in seven years, Steven was in brilliant form as he outplayed the younger man, whom he believed was top 10 material. Steven said his game plan was to ensure he wouldn't allow the teenager to dictate terms to him.

"I wanted to be aggressive and I don't think I could have out-rallied him, certainly I don't have the firepower to put the pressure on him."

"I'm into the quarter-finals now for the fifth time in a

row and to put two good back-to-back matches like this leaves me certainly feeling happy," Steven said.

Second seed Mantilla, who said he had benefited from practising on hardcourt surfaces in recent years in Barcelona, was also content.

Voinea looked set to embarrass last year's French Open semi-finalist until the Spaniard raised his game to another level. "In the beginning Adrian was playing too well, I couldn't do anything," Mantilla said.

"He hit a lot of winners, but then I thought he has to lose that form and I would be saying 'Ole'. I thought it wouldn't be possible for him to play like that the whole match. "In the second set I started to play better and then I went on to win the match. "I hope I haven't used up all my luck otherwise I will need to retire tomorrow (Thursday)."

Davenport and Graf puzzled by Korda drug mystery

SYDNEY (AFP) — Lindsay Davenport and Steffi Graf called Wednesday for a new probe into why the International Tennis Federation (ITF) let Czech star Petr Korda off for a drugs offence.

Davenport, the current World No. 1 and Graf, winner of 21 Grand Slam titles, questioned Korda's claim he did not know how the steroid got into his system.

The ITF accepted his explanation for a positive drugs test after losing in the Wimbledon quarter-finals and has allowed him to defend his Australian Open title in Melbourne next week.

"It seems to me that they've now set a precedent ... if I ever get caught I'm

just going to say 'I don't know how it got there' and every other player is going to say that," Davenport said after reaching the quarter-finals of the Adidas International in Sydney.

"They've opened a can of worms."

"From what I've heard about this drug it has to be injected and if you're getting a shot, you know your getting a shot in your body," the American added.

"I would just like to know why he was let off ... to say he didn't know how it got into his body, I don't know if that's true."

Graf also questioned why the ITF did not suspend Korda for one year from Grand Slam events. He was only

forced to pay back the \$94,000 he earned at Wimbledon.

"Maybe it's not for me to comment but if there is any kind of doping you really have to act on it very strongly," Graf said.

"There must be some reason that there was no reaction from the ITF ... I don't understand it."

"Maybe there's more to it. I don't know."

The ITF's appeals committee decided against suspending Korda because of "exceptional circumstances" which have yet to be revealed.

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McGwire home run ball sells for record-shattering \$2.7 million

NEW YORK (AFP) — The baseball that St. Louis Cardinal slugger Mark McGwire hit for a record 70th home run last season broke its second record on Tuesday, selling at auction here for \$2.7 million.

With commission, the buyer, who placed the winning bid by telephone, will fork over \$3.04 million to Guernsey's auction house for the ball originally made in Costa Rica for less than five dollars.

The staggering price paid for the ball at the auction of 41 items of sports memorabilia at Madison Square Garden was 22 times higher than the previous record which was paid just two months ago for one hit by New York Yankee great Babe Ruth.

The name of the buyer was not immediately available but businessman Irving Sternberg, who dropped out of the bidding at \$2.6 million said he had wanted "the ball to be used as a symbol of the nation and of baseball."

He added that he hoped the new owner felt the same way.

The ball passed into legend on September 27 when McGwire, the Cardinals' first baseman, belted it into

the stands at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, setting a new Major League Baseball home run record.

Researcher Philip Ozersky, who earns \$30,000 a year, recovered the ball immediately had it authenticated and deposited in a bank vault for safekeeping before deciding to sell it.

"I am completely exhilarated," Ozersky said after the sale, adding that he wanted to give at least some of his windfall to medical research groups such as the American Cancer Society and American Leukemia Society.

"I never would have expected to get any money from this," he said of his attendance at the September 27 game.

"Now I am going to sit with my lawyers to see how to distribute the money."

The balls that McGwire slugged for home runs 63, 67 and 68, which at the time they were hit were records themselves were also auctioned and fetched a total, including the 15-per cent commission, of \$142,600, according to Guernsey's President Arlen Ettinger.

In addition, three balls blasted for home runs by Chicago Cubs outfielder Sammy Sosa — his 61st, 64th and

66th — sold for a total of \$216,500, Ettinger said.

Sosa and McGwire were embroiled in a neck-and-neck race towards the end of the season to break the old record of 61 home runs set by New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris in 1961 and set a new one.

Their battle captivated Americans last fall.

The Dominican-born Sosa and native Californian McGwire remained on best of terms throughout the race with each congratulating each other when they surpassed a new level.

Sosa ended the season with 66 home runs.

A pair of shoes that McGwire wore in three games in which he hit home runs brought \$5,000.

Although the auction brought in a total of \$3.667 million, the lion's share of which came from the McGwire ball, the ball hit by Hank Aaron for his career 755th home run did not sell.

That ball, which some had hoped would sell for as much as \$1 million was withdrawn from sale when bidding stalled at \$800,000.

MICHAEL'S GOLDEN MOMENTS

CHICAGO (AP) — Some of Michael Jordan's most memorable big-game performances:

— The skinny freshman's 1982 corner jumper that beat Georgetown in the NCAA Finals and gave North Carolina's Dean Smith his first national title.

— The still NBA play-off-record 63-point performance against Larry Bird and the Celtics in 1986 after missing all but 18 games of the regular season with a foot injury. "God came to the game tonight and played under the name of Michael Jordan," Bird said. The Bulls lost the game 135-131.

— The Shot. With the Bulls down one point in the deciding fifth game, he went high over Cleveland's Craig Ehlo to hit a jumper that clinched the opening-round series against the Cavaliers in 1989.

— The highlight-film drive against the Lakers in the 1991 Finals, changing hands in mid-air for an acrobatic, left-handed bank shot on the other side of the basket.

— The shrug after raining down 3-pointers against Portland in the opener of the 1992 Finals as the Bulls went on their second title. He hit a playoff-record six 3s in one half against the Blazers.

— The Shot II over Gerald Wilkins, beating Cleveland again in the Eastern Conference semifinals, 1993.

— The winning jumper over Steve Smith against Atlanta in just his fourth game out of retirement in 1995.

— The game-winning jumper over Bryon Russell in the opener of the 1997 NBA Finals against Utah.

— His game-winning 3-pointer and 38-point effort against the Jazz in Game 5 — 15 in the final period — when he was so sick and dehydrated he was doubled over at times as he walked off the floor.

— His steal and game-winning jumper to beat the Jazz in the closing seconds of Game 6, giving the Bulls their sixth title of the decade last June.

Michael Jordan officially announces retirement

CHICAGO (AP) —

Michael Jordan, who won six U.S. league titles with Chicago Bulls and made the NBA popular throughout the world with his high-flying dunks, officially retired from basketball on Wednesday.

"I played it to the best I could play it," Jordan told a packed news conference at the United Center, the Bulls home court. "I tried to be the best basketball player I could be."

"I've had a great time," he said.

Jordan alluded to his first retirement in 1993, when he briefly pursued a professional baseball career.

"Well, we do this again, a second time," he said.

Word of Jordan's retirement broke late Monday night, but he had refused to comment until Wednesday. After leading the Bulls to their sixth championship in June, Jordan had said he would make an announcement on his future only once the National Basketball Association lockout ended.

"I thought about saying just two words. 'I'm gone,' but I thought I owed my fans a lot more than that," he said, with his wife, Juanita, at his side.

"My life will take a change," Jordan said.

He said he looked forward to being a parent and would "live vicariously through my kids," whether or not they played basketball.

"Mentally, I'm exhausted. I don't feel I have a challenge," Jordan said. "Physically, I feel great."

"This is a perfect time for me to walk away from the game."

"I'm at peace with that," Jordan said. "Joining the 35-year-old Bulls at the podium were Bulls chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and NBA commissioner David Stern.



In this 1998 file photo, Chicago Bulls player Michael Jordan answers questions during a press conference at the United Center in Chicago, Ill., during the NBA Finals. Jordan announced his retirement from basketball at a press conference in Chicago Wednesday (AFP photo)

"This is a day I hoped would never come," Reinsdorf said.

"It's a tough day for basketball fans all over the world."

Countered Stern: "I disagree with Jerry. This is a great day. The greatest player is retiring with the grace that describes his play."

Asked if he had lost his desire to play, Jordan responded: "The desire is always going to be there."

But he said he wanted to make sure that the desire was there "not one-fourth of the time I step onto the court, but every time."

Although he said, "I never say never," he absolutely closed the door on whether he would return to the game.

"I'm very secure in my decision," he said.

"I'm just going to enjoy life and do things I've never done before," Jordan said.

Jordan appeared with a bandage on his right index finger and said he said he severed a

tendon while trying to cut a cigar and would need surgery.

He said he hoped the Bulls would re-sign teammate Scottie Pippen, but he added that was his personal opinion and that he didn't know what decisions would make in signing free agents.

"We set high standards around here," he said.

Around the league and throughout the city that worships him, Jordan's impending retirement didn't come as a surprise.

But most acknowledged that neither the Bulls nor the NBA would be the same without him, especially during this lockout-shortened season.

Jordan met with a few teammates at his home Monday and told them the thought of playing an abbreviated, 50-game season wasn't enough of a challenge, the Chicago Tribune reported.

Now Jordan can go out as he always wanted — on top. His last-second shot — the last one he

might ever take in competition — beat Utah in Game 6 in June and gave the Bulls their sixth title.

"There's a way to go out as an athlete, and that's the way to go out," said B.J. Armstrong, one of about a dozen players working out Tuesday at the Berto Center.

Armstrong, who now plays with Charlotte, is a good friend of Jordan's and a teammate on Chicago's first three NBA championship teams.

Jordan leaves as a five-time winner of the league's Most Valuable Player Award, 10-time league scoring champion and the No. 1 per-game scorer in NBA history.

Jordan also claimed three international honours, leading the United States to the 1983 Pan Am Games title, the 1984 Olympic title and was a key member of the 1992 U.S. Olympic "Dream Team" that rolled to the gold in Barcelona, Spain, by an average margin of victory of 43.8 points.



Michael Jordan

IOC to examine Australian bribery allegations

SYDNEY (AFP) — The International Olympic Committee is to investigate allegations by former New South Wales Olympics minister Bruce Baird that he was asked to pay bribes during Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 games.

Australian IOC executive board member Kevin Gosper said Wednesday he had spoken to Baird about his claims that he was approached by one IOC member and an intermediary seeking cash in exchange for votes during the bid in 1993.

"He advised me of two conversations he had at the time of the Sydney bid, which may have been interpreted to be seeking some sort of opportunity," Gosper told ABC Radio.

"I've asked him to set that down on some piece of paper and I'll use that as part of the process we're going to have when I get back to Lausanne next week."

The evidence would be presented to the IOC's inquiry into the bribery allegations involving Salt Lake City, the hosts of the 2002 Winter Games.

Australian Minister for Sport Jackie Kelly called for Baird's allegations to be investigated immediately by the IOC.

"They must be investigated," she said.

Jacques Rogge, who also sits on the IOC executive board and chairs the Coordination Commission overseeing Sydney's preparations for the 2000 Games, said he was interested in seeing any evidence which Baird or others had.

The Belgian said the IOC needed documented facts, not declarations or allegations.

Baird, former state Olympics minister and now a member of the federal parliament, said he could tell investigators about people claiming to represent IOC members who had wanted to do deals to ensure a successful Sydney bid.

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Watergate-style break-in jolts Israeli election campaign

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's colourful election campaign promised to turn nasty Wednesday after a burglary at a US firm advising Labour Party chief Ehud Barak raised comparisons with the 1972 Watergate scandal that brought down U.S. President Richard Nixon.

In a pre-dawn raid Tuesday on the offices of political consultant Stanley Greenberg, thieves made away with information on Barak's campaign against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud Party in the May 17 elections, Labour Party officials said.

"The burglars stole computer disks containing information on Barak's bank accounts and assets," said Tal Zylberstein, a member of Labour's campaign team. Israeli newspapers said the stolen information also contained Barak's campaign strategy, including details of his planned appearances during the four months leading to the election.

A spokesman for Netanyahu, who is struggling in opinion polls following the collapse of his government last month, quickly denounced the Washington burglary as "unacceptable."

"I hope that those responsible will be quickly arrested," spokesman David Bar-Ilan told AFP. But suspicion over the break-in nevertheless fell on Barak's right-wing opponents given his position as the leading contender to topple Netanyahu.

Zylberstein told Israeli radio that "according to infor-

mation from Washington, a Jewish group trying to hurt Barak's campaign was behind the theft. He did not elaborate.

"It is clear to us that whoever did it knew that these files contained something that could be very harmful to Barak or very beneficial to Netanyahu," Greenberg associate Steve Rabinowitz told the Yedioth Achronot newspaper.

U.S. police spokesmen said they had no leads in the case. Barak himself made no public comment Wednesday.

The break-in occurred at Greenberg Quinlan Research, a firm specialising in political polling and strategy whose clients have included U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The company's star consultant, James Carville, who is credited with masterminding Clinton's 1992 election victory and helped British Labour leader Tony Blair win the premiership in 1997, was in Israel three weeks ago working with Barak's campaign team.

U.S. police said the burglars removed a roof vent and then broke through the ceiling of Greenberg's office in an apparently professional operation which drew the immediate attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In Israel, the press was quick to compare the burglary with the 1972 break-in at Democratic Party headquarters in Washington's Watergate apartment complex.

Members of a White House "dirty tricks" team were caught trying to steal

Democratic campaign secrets and Nixon, facing impeachment over his attempt to cover up the White House role in the affair, resigned from office.

Zylberstein declined to draw such parallels, which imply an involvement in the latest break-in by elements linked to Netanyahu's Likud party.

"This is a sensitive matter and we have to avoid making any hasty accusations," he said.

Labour MP Avi Yeheshkel demanded a parliamentary inquiry into the incident and called for Israeli police to cooperate with the FBI in its probe.

Netanyahu was forced into early elections last month when his right-wing parliamentary coalition collapsed and opinion polls show that Barak is the most serious threat to his reelection as prime minister.

The election campaign turned sour from the very beginning last week with Barak and Netanyahu accusing one another of effectively allying with Palestinian factions to lead Israel to ruin.

Barak, Netanyahu and prime minister, former military chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, all received death threats in the first days of the campaign.

The threats recalled the 1995 assassination of Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jewish fanatic and prompted calls from politicians across the political spectrum for a toning down of the electoral rhetoric.



REGENT JOINS WORSHIPPERS ON LAYLAT AL QADR: His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Wednesday joins worshippers at King Abdullah Mosque for a ceremony organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs marking the start of Laylat Al Qadr. Prince Hassan distributed prizes and shields to the winners of the Hashemite competition for memorising and reciting the Holy Koran (Photo by Yusef 'Allan)

Butler had U.S. bug installed in Iraq — Ritter

BONN (R) — A German magazine on Wednesday quoted former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter as saying he last year installed a listening device for U.S. intelligence in Baghdad on orders of chief weapons inspector Richard Butler.

Ritter told Stern monthly he had fitted a listening device for radio and telephone communication which was used by U.S. intelligence to select targets in Iraq for the U.S.-British Operation Desert Fox air bombardment last December.

"I was acting on the orders of Richard Butler," Ritter said, when asked whether he installed such a device when he

worked for the United Nations Special Commission known as UNSCOM in Iraq.

Ritter said their inspections hit an impasse two years ago and he came up with a new concept to obtain secret information about Iraq's secret weapons programme. But in April 1998 Richard Butler declared the new operation over.

"He [Butler] then consented to a new method of surveillance. It was run exclusively for the United States," Ritter said in an interview released ahead of publication on Thursday.

"I protested against it because it violated our mandate and only served the intelligence ser-

vice of one country. That was one reason why I left UNSCOM last August," he said.

Ritter, a former U.S. Marines Lieutenant Colonel, said only Butler and his deputy Charles Duelfer had access to the information acquired through what he referred to as "the black box" listening device, apart from U.S. intelligence.

"Butler was in a difficult position. His chief supporters in the United States put him under immense pressure," Ritter said.

"The U.S. assured him this method of obtaining information under the UNSCOM flag would not be abused."

"No one knows exactly what information they collected. But it is clear that information from my U.N. inspections was used to determine targets for Operation Desert Fox," Ritter said.

UNSCOM was created by the U.N. Security Council after the Gulf War in 1991 to supervise the scarping of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The commission withdrew all its personnel from Iraq before the Dec. 16-19 U.S.-British strikes.

Ritter has recently given a series of interviews saying Butler had helped Washington spy on Iraq. Butler has denied the allegations.

Briton freed as Yemen puts tourist kidnappers on trial

SANAA (AFP) — A British hostage in Yemen was released Wednesday as three men were charged for a separate kidnapping last month that left four Western tourists dead after a rescue operation.

John Brooke, an employee of U.S. oil firm Halliburton, was released after mediation by a tribal leader, a Yemeni security official said.

"Our ambassador in Yemen has seen him and finds him safe and well. We are making arrangements to fly him back home as quickly as possible," the British Foreign Office said in London.

Amid repeated British calls for a peaceful outcome to the kidnapping, tribal leaders had been mediating to achieve Brooke's release and offered to pay a ransom.

Yemen's unruly tribes have kidnapped more than 150 foreigners over the past five years to use them as bargaining chips in disputes with Sanaa, mostly over aid for their region.

All of them have been freed unharmed, unlike with the December kidnappings of a group of 16 Western tourists in southern Yemen that was the work of Islamic militants.

Brooke was captured Saturday by armed men from the Al Juaydi tribe in mountains near the eastern oil-producing region of Marib.

He was moved to a hideout near the Saudi border in Khab, more than 200 kilometres north of Sanaa. The tribesmen reportedly demanded the release from jail of one of their men who is facing a murder charge.

It was unclear if concessions were made for Brooke's release.

Meanwhile, in court alleged Islamist ringleader Zin Al Abidin Al Mehdhar, also known as Abu Hassan, and two brothers went on trial for the kidnapping of the 16 tourists on Dec. 28.

The militants could face the death penalty if convicted under a law introduced last August.

The kidnapping ended in tragedy during a rescue operation the next day by Yemeni security forces. It has not been confirmed which side fired the

fatal shots that killed three Britons and an Australian.

The three suspects appeared handcuffed in court in the southern town of Zinjibar. Eleven others are on the run, according to Yemeni authorities.

They were charged with kidnapping, resisting security forces, illegal possession of firearms and explosives and setting up an armed group blamed for several attacks in south Yemen. No murder charge was filed.

Abu Hassan, 28, acknowledged belonging to the "Islamic Army of Aden and Abyan," which aimed "to lead a jihad [holy war]."

Mocking the court, the bearded Islamist said it was "illegal because it does not apply Sharia [Islamic law] and refers to a Western penal code, in particular the French."

"The miscreant regime of Sanaa does not have the right to judge me because it is subjected to America and Western countries," he said while smiling.

He also rose to the defence of Arab countries such as Iraq, the target of a U.S.-led air war just before the kidnapping.

The other defendants in court, Ahmad Mohammad Atef, 26, and Mohammad Ali Atef, 19, denied the charges. "They're young. I assume full responsibility," said Abu Hassan.

The trial in Zinjibar, capital of Abyan province where the group of tourists were seized, was adjourned until after next week's feast of Eid Al Fitr. The British embassy sent a diplomat as an observer.

Three other kidnappers were killed in the rescue operation. A policeman also died in the firefight during which the hostages were used as human shields.

The kidnappers were reported to have demanded the release of fellow Islamists, including five Britons and another man detained by Yemeni authorities on suspicion of terrorism.

A British diplomat has so far seen four of the Britons held in the southern port city of Aden, while the fifth holds dual British-Yemeni nationality.

State says Israel 'light unto nations' on torture issue

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel is a "light unto the nations" in its interrogation of Palestinian prisoners, a government lawyer told the Supreme Court Wednesday.

Attorney Yehuda Schaeffer was responding to a petition against the use of "moderate physical force" against Palestinians believed to possess information which the authorities need to prevent acts of terrorism.

Schaeffer cited a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that methods used by the British authorities in Northern Ireland against suspected IRA guerrillas do not constitute torture.

"In this as in other matters we are still a light unto the nations," Schaeffer said, referring to a Zionist slogan coined by Zionist thinkers about a century ago, and based on a prophecy of Isaiah.

Schaeffer said the British methods include deprivation of food and drink, and subjection to "white noise" — and are harsher than those permitted by Israel's Shin Bet security service.

The British methods — used on 14 suspects in 1971 — were described by the European court in a controversial 1978 ruling as "inhuman or degrading treatment," but not torture. The British, severely embarrassed by the case, have long since sworn off the methods.

The Shin Bet has never spelled out its methods, but testimony by security agents in court hearings has indicated they include sleep deprivation and tying up suspects in painful positions for several hours at a time.

The United Nations has defined such methods as torture, and human rights groups have

said that at least 10 detainees have died in the past decade as a result of interrogation.

Standards of interrogation in Western countries appeared likely to dominate the proceedings.

The petitioners submitted an affidavit from a lawyer for Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, saying that interrogators never questioned his client unless lawyers were present, even though they "feared that similar attacks in other cities were planned or contemplated."

Robert Nigh Jr.'s statement was provided at the request of the Public Committee against Torture in Israel.

"We submitted the affidavit to show that even the case of a very dangerous terrorist, responsible for the deaths of scores of civilians, can be investigated without resorting to force," said spokes-

woman Hannah Friedman.

McVeigh is appealing his death sentence for the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people and injured more than 500 others.

In addition to the Public Committee, the petitioners include a civil rights group and four Palestinians who claim to have been tortured by the Shin Bet.

When the petition was submitted last May by two human rights groups and four Palestinian individuals, the Supreme Court agreed for the first time to consider the overall policy of using physical force.

At that time, the court indicated that it was likely to refer the matter to the Knesset for legislation. The petitioners hope for a ruling that would allow for the prosecution of alleged Shin Bet torturers.

In earlier individual cases, the court consistently upheld the right of the Shin Bet to use "moderate physical force" to extract confessions. The vague term was coined over a decade ago by a commission investigating the Shin Bet.

Counsel for the state, Shai Feldman, cited cases in which he said it was established beyond doubt that the methods used by the Shin Bet had prevented suicide bombings, saving large numbers of lives.

No decision was handed down Wednesday. The court is to convene again at a later date to hear the arguments of the petitioners.

Human rights groups have also accused the Palestinian Authority of routinely torturing detainees during interrogation, and nearly a dozen prisoners have died in Palestinian jails in the past four years.

Clinton blasts impeachment process on eve of Senate trial

President hopes 'the right thing will be done'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton stepped up his attack on the impeachment process Wednesday on the eve of the historic Senate trial in the sex-and-lies scandal.

The president's lawyers issued a bolstered version of their defense brief which insists that the charges stemming from the Monica Lewinsky affair do not rise to the level of impeachment and should be dismissed.

"If the Senate removes this president for a wrongful relationship he hoped to keep private, for what will the House ask the Senate to remove the next president and the next?" demanded a 130-page document expanding on the trial brief issued Monday.

Clinton has refrained from commenting on the Senate trial, but pressed by reporters Wednesday, he said, "I trust that the right thing will be done."

The president also pointed to a show of support by a group of scholars, saying: "The important thing I think you should be asking yourselves is why did nearly 900 constitutional experts say that they strongly felt that this matter was not the

subject of impeachment?" Prosecutors from the House Judiciary Committee open their arguments Thursday charging the president committed perjury and obstructed justice to cover up his affair with Lewinsky.

Clinton's lawyers next week will insist the president is innocent of the charges which, even if true, do not rise to the level of impeachable "high crimes and misdemeanors."

"The Senate has an obligation to turn away an unwise and unwarranted misuse of the awesome power of impeachment," the document stated.

The White House also reiterated its warning that a Senate conviction, which requires a two-thirds majority, would threaten national security.

"Removing the president on these facts would substantially alter the delicate constitutional balance and move us closer to a quasi-parliamentary system, in which the president is elected to office by the choice of the people but continues in office only at the pleasure of the Congress," said the brief.

Clinton met with his lawyers Tuesday to sign off on the new

brief, but he appealed Wednesday for a chance to get back to the "problems of the people."

"The important thing for me is to spend as little time thinking about that as possible and as much time working on the issues we're here to discuss as possible," said Clinton, who was meeting with labour leaders.

Polls show most Americans did not support the Dec. 19 House vote to impeach Clinton on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

The president alluded to the public's opposition to the process, saying: "I think they would like if it somebody here would put their [the public's] interests first."

Meanwhile, the House "managers" were putting the final touches on their case issued Monday which insists Clinton "acted in a manner contrary to his trust as president and subversive to the rule of law and constitutional government."

The 13 members of the House Judiciary Committee charges Clinton committed perjury when he denied under oath he had an affair with Lewinsky.

Top brand-name U.S. firms sued over Pacific island 'sweatshops'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Workers on the Pacific island of Saipan filed class-action suits Wednesday seeking more than \$1 billion from major U.S. clothing designers and retailers accused of using "sweatshops" in the U.S. territory.

The suits accuse Sears, Wal-Mart, The Gap, Tommy Hilfinger, Oshkosh B'Gosh and others of a "racketeering conspiracy" by using cheap labour — mostly young women from China, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Thailand — to produce clothing in "intolerable" working conditions.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said in a statement released here they were representing 50,000 workers on Saipan, part of the U.S. territory of the Northern Mariana Islands, in two class action lawsuits filed Wednesday in Saipan and California.

Foreign-owned contractors operating for the U.S. companies are charged with failing to pay overtime and creating intolerable work and living conditions.

Lawyers said the workers were allegedly lured to Saipan with promises of high pay and quality work in the United States.

"Instead they found themselves working up to 12-hour days, seven days a week, oftentimes 'off the clock' without receiving any pay or overtime," the statement said.

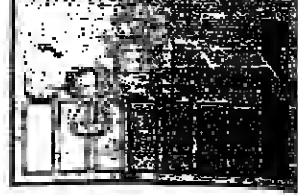
The litigation was the first attempt to make U.S. retailers and designers accountable for mistreatment of workers in foreign-owned factories operating on U.S. soil, the lawyers said.

A third lawsuit was filed in California by human rights and labour organisations accusing the companies of trafficking in "hot goods" manufactured in violation of U.S. labour laws.

Together, the three lawsuits are seeking more than \$1 billion in damages and compensation for the workers.

"To allow such squalid conditions to persist on American soil is both patently unlawful and morally reprehensible," said lead attorney Al Meyerhoff.

"Saipan is America's worst sweatshop." The Mariana, a U.S. commonwealth, is exempt from U.S. minimum wage and immigration laws, allowing factories to recruit Asian workers and pay them \$3.05 an hour, well below the U.S. minimum of \$5.15.



Car thieves target outdoor lovers

MBABANE (R) — Car thieves in Swaziland have found easy targets among couples who drive to remote areas to make love in the open, the Times of Swaziland said in a front-page report Wednesday. Police spokesman Sabelo Dlamini told the newspaper that many of the 585 cars stolen in the tiny mountain kingdom last year were taken while their owners were making love under the sky. "It came to our attention during investigations that some of the stolen vehicles were parked in remote areas, which couples usually visit to make love outdoors. Some, of course, go to commit acts they would rather not be seen doing, like adultery," he said.

'Dead' bandit surrenders

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A bandit who the Indian police claimed to have killed some three months ago walked into a court to give himself up, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Dhananjay Singh made his dramatic appearance in the northern city of Lucknow on Tuesday, taking officials completely off guard. The police claimed to have shot Singh dead in October 1998. The authorities have now ordered an investigation into Singh's reported "death."

Robber falls asleep after meal

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian thief was arrested after treating himself to a filling meal in his victim's kitchen while falling asleep, police said Wednesday. Tarek Khabalana had finished robbing a Cairo apartment Tuesday and had packed up his loot when he went to the kitchen to eat. The thief, who was found by the building's owner, had finished robbing a Cairo apartment Tuesday and had packed up his loot when he went to the kitchen to eat. The thief, who was found by the building's owner, had finished robbing a Cairo apartment Tuesday and had packed up his loot when he went to the kitchen to eat.

Cat causes power cut

WARSAW (AFP) — Some 25,000 Warsaw residents were left in the dark after a cat short-circuited a 110 kilovolt electricity transformer station in the Polish capital, electricity company officials said Wednesday. Trams were paralysed for an hour in the incident late Tuesday in the Praga district of the city. Several thefts from shops in the area were reported during the blackout. The cat was killed instantly, a spokesman said.

Couple divorces after boasts of sex life

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian woman was granted a divorce from her husband because he would not stop boasting to other people about their sex life, court officials said Wednesday. Dosuki Ali Abdul Salam kept telling neighbours and co-workers intimate details about his marriage to Inan Mohammad despite her repeated requests to stop. Mohammad filed for divorce after he struck her in front of neighbours because she asked him not to boast about their bedroom exploits in front of them.

Smokers booted from ship

MIAMI (R) — Nine passengers have been booted off the luxury liner MS Paradise for smoking cigarettes since Carnival Corp launched the no-smoking vessel a month ago. Carnival official said on Tuesday. The smoking ban is strictly enforced on the 2,000-passenger ship, which sails from Miami on several cruises through the Caribbean. Before boarding, passengers must sign an agreement acknowledging they will not smoke, and are forced to pay their own way home if they break the rule.

Murder Carlos the

Volume 24 Sur

Colombian cops kidnapping-murder case

Boomsday sect leader arrested

At least 15 rebels killed in Kosovo

Turkish music groups accused of guerrilla links